

8-2010

Black and White and Read in Profile: The Silhouette as Race Manirhetoric in Flannery O'Connor and Kara Walker

Michelle dacus Carr

Clemson University, mdacus@clemson.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/all_dissertations



Part of the [Rhetoric and Composition Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Carr, Michelle dacus, "Black and White and Read in Profile: The Silhouette as Race Manirhetoric in Flannery O'Connor and Kara Walker" (2010). *All Dissertations*. 564.

https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/all_dissertations/564

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Dissertations at TigerPrints. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Dissertations by an authorized administrator of TigerPrints. For more information, please contact kokeefe@clemson.edu.

BLACK AND WHITE AND READ IN PROFILE:
THE *SILHOUETTE* AS RACE MANIRHETORIC
IN FLANNERY O'CONNOR
AND KARA WALKER

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy
Rhetorics, Communication, and Information Design

by
Michelle Dacus Carr
August 2010

Accepted by:
Dr. Victor Vitanza, Committee Chair
Dr. Arthur Young
Dr. Andrea Feeser
Ms. Christina Hung
Dr. Lewis R. Gordon, Professor of Philosophy, Temple University

ABSTRACT

My research project, in fulfillment of the requirements for the dissertation in Rhetorics, Communication, and Information Design, utilizes the schema or trope of the *silhouette* as a binding metaphor for black/white race relationships in America. Specifically, I argue that there is no better model for examining social interactions between the races than the back- and fore-grounding that is transacted through this primarily visual—but also verbal and oral—technique of profiling and outlining. This is particularly true given its origins in discriminatory practice, dating as far back as the literary *iconismos* and *characterismos* used to categorize Greek and Roman slaves, and the ethnic taxonomies perpetuated with Johann Kaspar Lavater's *Essays on Physiognomy*.

In locating the silhouette as a major trope in the discourses on race, I am adding to the rhetorical lexicon by coining the term *manirhetorical*, and applying it to illustrate the unique and adaptive features of the silhouette—its suitability to operate through various media and to accommodate multiple tasks. Thus, I examine the *manirhetorical* practices of two artists, one primarily literary—Flannery O'Connor—whose principled positioning in the Southern gothic tradition of grotesque literature comports accurately with the sense of privilege and entitlement that is examined in a focused way in the field of Whiteness Studies. The other artist considered in this study—Kara Walker—is primarily a visual rhetorical virtuoso, whose works with the silhouette are used to both develop and demonstrate her racial and feminist ethos. Both artists perform the recuperation and re/appropriation of the silhouette as *manirhetorical* trope of critique in the “signifyin’” tradition described by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Both artists make multiple uses of the silhouette as verbal and visual representations for race relations, and for their accordant power dynamics—and in the process perform racial profiling.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated first and foremost to my father, Leonard Augusta Dacus (1926-2007). He remains my biggest supporter and the person I admire most in the world. Thank you for the contributions and sacrifices made by all of my family throughout this strenuous effort: my mother, Mrs. Cornelia Points Dacus; my husband, Alonzo Earl Carr, Sr.; my children, Qrescent Mali Mason, Hanae Victoria Mason, and Alonzo Earl Carr, Jr.; my siblings, and all the members of my extended family.

In addition, I am particularly grateful to professors and advisors at Clemson, most notably my dissertation director, Victor Vitanza, whose guidance and patience helped me in ways beyond my expression. I want to thank here the members of my committee, who taught me, coached me, and believed in me: Art Young, Andrea Feeser, and Christina Hung. Thank you also to Todd May for spending a summer facilitating some of the more difficult philosophical reading that undergirds my study. Thank you Tharon Howard for providing the considerable resources of the Clemson Multimodal Authoring Teaching and Reading Facility (MATRF) and for your mentorship in helping build my technological understanding. Thank you to my cohorts and colleagues in the RCID and MAPC Programs, particularly Steve Thompson, Mike Hovan, Dev Bose, and Alicyn Butler, and to Dr. Frankie Felder, Dean of the Graduate School, and a mentor.

Finally, thank you for those whose service and generosity I greatly appreciate and can never repay. Thank you, Dr. Lewis R. Gordon of Temple University, my outsider reader and intellectual guidepost. Thank you also to my administrators and colleagues at Alabama State University for facilitating my teaching and writing, most notably Drs. Alfred Smith, Evelyn Hodge, David Iyegha, Frank Moorner, and Derryn Moten. Thank you to all of those whose thoughts and prayers encouraged me.



Silhouette of the Author by Tim Arnold, "The Silhouette Man," June 9, 2008

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
TITLE PAGE	i
ABSTRACT	ii
DEDICATION	iii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vii
CHAPTER	
I. A PROFILE ON RACE.....	1
On Method	1
Setting the Stage for Racism	6
The New Negro	7
A More Activist Rhetoric	10
Race, Post-Race.....	12
Race: Deal or No Deal?.....	18
Post-Post-Race	21
II. THE SILHOUETTE AS <i>MANIRHETORICAL</i> TROPE FOR RACE	26
Silhouette and the Theory of Forms.....	30
Physiognomy of Silhouette.....	31
Physiognomy and Iconography	34
Silhouette Takes Shape	38
Mechanical Reproduction.....	40
Art Meets Science.....	41
Art Meets Edouart	42
The Doctor is In.....	44
The Ironie Profile	46
Literary License and the Silhouette.....	48
Politics of the Silhouette: Two Sides of the Same (or a Similar) Coin.....	50
III. FLANNERY O'CONNOR AND THE VIRTUAL NEGRO	53
A Developing Aesthetic	58
Whistling Dixie: The Whitewashed South	61
A Shroud of Good Breeding.....	65
Jumping Jim Crow	67
Writing Whiteness: Distortion, Not Abstraction.....	69
Geography and the Grotesque.....	72
A Grotesque Word.....	75

Table of Contents (Continued)

	Page
Stock in Charity	79
American-African	83
Blinded by the White.....	85
Shades of Grey in Whiteness.....	89
The Bad Faith of Whiteness.....	92
“Freedom” and the Rhetoric of Racism.....	95
Antiblack Racism	97
The “Antidote” to Racism.....	100
Signifyin’—Cure for the Cure?	104
Virtual Reality and Race	106
 IV. KARA WALKER AND THE FORM OF THE CONTENT.....	 107
Profiling the Silhouette	107
Birth of a Nationalist	113
Double, Double Toil and Trouble.....	116
A Prototype of Black Femininity	119
Cutting to the Chase	124
Herstory.....	129
Sticks and Stones.....	131
The Form of Content	135
Rites of Passage	139
Death by a Thousand Cuts	142
Born Again?	146
Send in the Clown.....	150
A House Negress	154
Ink Spots or Inkblots.....	158
Reading Rorschach	163
Refuting Rorschach.....	166
 V. PEDAGOGY OF THE PROFILE: SPEAKING RACE, TEACHING SILHOUETTE	 169
Black and White and Seeing Red.....	169
All Hands on Deck.....	172
Rhetoric(s) to the Rescue.....	173
<i>Manirhetorics</i> of Silhouette	177
Art of <i>Manirhetorics</i>	179
Teaching Race, Speaking Silhouette.....	181
The Final Cut	185
 WORKS CITED	 188

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1: Screen Shots of Televised Kennedy-Nixon Presidential Debates, 1960	14
2: Henry Louis Gates, Jr. AP Photo/Cambridge Police Department	15
3: Obama Presidential Campaign Poster, 2008.....	22
4: Obama as Socialist Joker, 2009, Robyn Beck, Getty Images	22
5: Goddess and Regal Male Figures (Phaidon 32).....	27
6: Hierakonpolis Palette	28
7: Classical Greek Krater, 380-400 BC	29
8: Illustration of Plato's Cave from <i>The Republic</i>	31
9: Mural of Galen and Hippocrates, 12 th Century, Anagni, Italy	33
10: The Corinthian Maid, Joseph Wright (1782-84).....	36
11: Auguste Edouart Group Cutting (Unidentified)	43
12: Illustration from Darwin's <i>Expression of Emotions</i>	44
13: Drawing of Great Chain of Being from Didacus Valades, <i>Rhetorica Christiana</i> , 1579	55
14: "I don't enjoy looking at these old pictures either, but it doesn't hurt my reputation for people to think I'm a lover of fine arts." O'Connor cartoon, Courtesy of GSCW	58
15: O'Connor Illustration from the Closing to a Letter, <i>Collected Works</i> , 1063	59
16: O'Connor with Self-Portrait, www.bedfordstmartins.com/.../oconnor.htm ..	60
17: Sherwood Anderson.....	74
18: 1776 Performance of Thomas Southerne's <i>Oroonoko</i>	80
19: Aphra Behn by Mary Beale	80
20: Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Sketch by Norman B. Wood, 1897	82
21: <i>Pentecost</i> , Woodcut by Helen Siegl	91

List of Figures (Continued)

Figure	Page
22: Kara Walker's "Freedom Fighters for the Society of Forgotten Knowledge," 2005.....	95
23: Drawing of O'Connor by Barry Moser, Courtesy of GSCW	96
24: "I'll Be a Monkey's Uncle," Kara Walker, 1996	103
25: <i>Untitled (Hunting Scenes)</i> , Kara Walker, 2001	107
26: <i>Edouart Silhouette, Frank Johnson, Leader of the Band, 1842-44</i>	109
27: <i>Edouart Silhouette, Louis-Joseph Papineau, 1840</i>	109
28: <i>Lithograph, Gargantua, Honore' Daumier, 1831</i>	111
29: <i>Adrian Piper, Calling Card, Undated</i>	117
30: <i>Flora</i> , Image Credit: Stratford Historical Society, Stratford, CT	118
31: <i>The Liberation of Aunt Jemima</i> , Betye Saar, 1972	120
32: <i>Constantin Brancusi, La Negresse Blond, 1926</i>	121
33: <i>Henri Matisse, La Negresse, 1952</i>	121
34: <i>Joan Miro, A Star Caresses the Breast of a Negress (Painting Poem) 1938</i>	122
35: <i>For the Benefit of All Races of Mankind (Mos Specially the Master One, Boss) An Exhibition of Artifacts, Remnants, and Effluvia EXCAVATED from the Black Heart of a Negress VII</i> , Kara Walker, 2002	124
36: <i>Topsy</i> , in a Scene from Stowe's <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i> , 1852.....	125
37: <i>Topsy</i> , Ink etching by Kara Walker, c1995	125
38: <i>Untitled</i> , Kara Walker, 1996.....	126
39: <i>Slavery! Slavery! Presenting a GRAND and LIFELIKE Panoramic Journey into Picturesque Southern Slavery or "Life at 'Ol' Virginny's Hole' (sketches from Plantation Life)." See the Peculiar Institution as never before! All cut from black paper by the able hand of Kara Elizabeth Walker, an Emancipated Negress and leader in her Cause</i> , Kara Walker, 1997.	127
40: <i>Excerpt of the Negress from Walker's Slavery! Slavery! 1997</i>	127
41: <i>Walker's Gone: An Historical Romance of Civil War As it Occurred Between the Dusky Thighs of Young Negress and Her Heart</i> , 1994.....	129
42: <i>Walker's Installation, Letter from a Black Girl</i> , 1998.....	132

List of Figures (Continued)

Figure	Page
43: Adrian Piper, <i>Self-Portrait</i> , 1981	133
44: <i>The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti</i> , Ben Shahn, 1931-32	137
45: Page from Lavater's <i>Essays on Physiognomy</i>	138
46: Miss Phillis Wheatley on Book Cover	141
47: <i>CUT</i> by Kara Walker, 1998.....	144
48: <i>Successes</i> , Kara Walker, 1998	147
49: Kara Walker, <i>Untitled</i> from <i>American Primitives</i> , 1996	150
50: The Two Faces of Bert Williams, c1900	152
51: Panorama Excerpt from Kara Walker's <i>The Renaissance Society</i> , 1997	158
52: Detail of the Young Negress as Marionette from <i>The Renaissance Society</i> , 1997	158
53: Excerpt of the Sculpting Negress from Walker's <i>The Renaissance Society</i> , 1997	160
54: Leonardo's <i>Mona Lisa</i> , 1505-07.....	162
55: Three of the Ten Inkblots Used in Rorschach Testing	163
56: Excerpt of a "Rorschached" Negress from <i>The Renaissance Society</i> , 1997.....	166
57: <i>African American</i> , Kara Walker, 1998	167
58: Photo-Portrait of the Artist Kara Walker in Front of Her Art	168
59: Kara Walker, <i>A Work on Progress</i> , 1998.....	169
60: Barry Blitt Drawing, nyt.com, March 27, 2010	170
61: Kara Walker, <i>Emancipation Approximation</i> , 2000	187

CHAPTER ONE

PROFILE ON RACE

On Method

One must try to get behind or beneath the presuppositions which sustain a given type of inquiry and ask the questions that can be begged in its practice in the interest of determining why this type of inquiry has been designed to solve the problems it characteristically tries to solve.

Hayden White, "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact"

Race-talk can be a zero sum game. Most often, race operates like ambient noise in daily interactions. Yet it can also be volatile, disquieting, and painful to the point of violence. *Razza*, a 16th century Italian derivation of the word *race*, denotes a group with common features. But more than anything today, what race has come to represent is *otherness*, what is—what seemingly *must be*—left out, as much as what is included. Thus importantly, exclusion is tantamount to inclusion in the narrative on race. In *The Content of the Form*, Hayden White defines narrative as a "meta-code"—a venue for transmitting a shared reality between and among cultures or /and races. According to White, the absence or refusal of narrative signifies an absence of meaning (1-2).

Here, I juxtapose sets of narratives—fictional and non-fictional, visual and literary. I conduct rhetorical analysis to fashion a shape of *race rhetoric* that draws on various media and genres, while retaining some mutual significations. I look at race in its many derivations as social, biological, anatomical, cultural, and political phenomena by applying the historical schema of the *silhouette* as a representational paradigm most typically associated with the field of art, though greatly underserved and undervalued by such restriction. I illustrate how the addition or subtraction of a white *ground* affects the ways silhouette operates to profile or outline racial characteristics—sometimes in black paper cutouts, and sometimes by means of literary typing or cultural caricature.

Generally, I utilize this tool from the tradition of visual linguistics and re-appropriate it for verbal/literary rhetoric as well. In keeping with its historical roots, I further situate the silhouette as a major trope in the discourses on race, as a binding metaphor for black-white relations. I do this by first looking at race from a literary/historical perspective, highlighting defining—anthologized and accessible—moments in the evolution of black racial identity. Then, I analyze the development of the silhouette as an oftentimes-overlapping occurrence with racial politics of blackness and whiteness.

Part of my own personal narrative as a black American is realizing that race is a perplexing entrenchment in American society. It is foundational for this nation in a way that democracy only later came to be. Concurrent with race, *racism*, it appears, arrived at Point Comfort, Virginia in 1619 along with the very first settlers on a Dutch man-of-war carrying “twenty Negars” from Angola in tow, according to Bob Deans (118). More than a year later, the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock, and it took democracy another 169 years to arrive. Those transported Africans, along with some European refugees, entered a 7-year period of indentured servitude; but unlike their white counterparts, the blacks never ceased serving. Their subjugation would roll over into permanent *slavery*. Each would become, in the words of Frederick Douglass, “a slave for life” (23).

In celebration of the 400th anniversary of the Jamestown landing, Deans provides a chronicle of the history of slavery in *The River Where America Began*. He writes,

In the single month of August 1619, the seeds of democracy and slavery had been sown side by side along the banks of the James, the twisted paradox of American beginnings rooted in a contradiction that would confound and conflict the nation for centuries to come. Slavery was not to be some alien practice awkwardly grafted onto the trunk of American liberty. It was an integral and essential part of the nation’s inception, without which the very means of American independence might never have been secured. Its origins passed with barely a historical whisper. (118)

This quagmire of essentialism and denial is the soil into which the seeds of the New World were planted. It is also where black/white racial identities were tilled in the US.

Southern slavery spawned American racism. From its origins in the African *diaspora*, beginning on the Ivory Coast of West Africa, over 250 years of American chattel slavery ensued. It dates from that first settlement at Jamestown to its abolition in the Emancipation Proclamation by Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863, and the law that gave it credence, the 13th Amendment, signed into law in 1865. Yet racism remained legal. In the 2010's, even international race relations are colored by the American history of African enslavement and its vast social, cultural, political, and economic fallout.

Those transported Africans had a strong hunger for a voice, even/especially in slavery. Removed not only from their motherland of Africa, they were also detached from their mother tongues, the myriad languages of their native tribes: Yoruba, Ibo, Swahili, and others. They saw adoption of English, 'the master's language,' as a key to hearing and being heard—literacy as one more step toward liberation. They would gain this literacy, even though it was illegal to do so, by any means necessary.

As one example of this, a young Frederick Douglass (1817-1895) bartered food with his white playmates in place of learning the alphabet. He was driven to this drastic measure—in the sense that he could hardly bear to part with his small daily rations—when his Mistress Auld began, then refused, to teach him. In his *Narrative (Written by Himself)*, Douglass originally describes Mistress Auld as a naturally caring and nurturing woman who was later corrupted by her submission to her husband's power. He writes,

Just at this point of my progress, Mr. Auld found out what was going on, and at once forbade Mrs. Auld to instruct me further, telling her, among other things, that it was unlawful, as well as unsafe, to teach a slave to read. To use his own words, further, he said, 'If you give a nigger an inch, he will take an ell. A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master—to do as he is told to do. Learning would *spoil* the best nigger in the world. Now,' said he, 'if you teach that nigger ...how to read.... it would forever unfit him to be a slave.' (20)

Along with his disappointment in Master and Mistress Auld, Douglass experienced a renewed resolve to seek out liberation via literacy after overhearing this exchange.

Mr. Auld's words, he writes, "sank deep into my heart, stirred up sentiments within that lay slumbering.... I now understood what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty—to wit, the white man's power to enslave the black man" (qtd. in Hill 287-88). That power to enslave, Douglass surmised, was the power of withholding knowledge, and he was bound and determined that his pursuit of knowledge would not be thwarted. Douglass' narrative continues:

From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to *freedom*... Though conscious of the difficulty of learning without a teacher, I set out with high hope, and a fixed purpose, at whatever the cost of trouble, to learn how to read.... What [my master] most dreaded, that I most desired. What he most loved, that I most hated. That which to him was a great evil, to be carefully shunned, was to me a great good, to be diligently sought; and the argument which he so warmly urged, against my learning to read, only served to inspire me with a desire and determination to learn. (20)

Once he learned to read, and then write, Douglass used his knowledge, along with his commitment to freedom, as his ticket out of slavery. He did this by forging his own "pass" to leave the plantation, and by escaping to freedom with some fellow slaves. As a fugitive, he would later write back to Mr. Auld to thank him for his harsh refusal. Without it, Douglass wrote, he might not have fully realized the importance of education for the slaves and done all that he could to obtain it for himself.

By way of sharp contrast, it is instructive to consider the interesting case of Miss Phillis Wheatley (1753-1784). Wheatley was kidnapped from Africa as a child, brought to America, and sold from a Boston auction block to a wealthy family. So masterful did their young nanny become at her newly acquired language that John and Susannah Wheatley were soon inviting friends to their parlor to witness the recitation of poetry by their Ethiopian prodigy. A sickly child, Wheatley required almost as much attention as the children in her charge, and came to be educated right alongside them, acquiring a classical education in Greek, Latin, British and American classics, and the Bible.

Even today, Wheatley can be viewed as one of the best examples of the syncretism of African-American identity. Neither all this: American, nor all that: African, she remains the image of a figure caught betwixt and between. This liminality manifested itself in almost every area of Wheatley's life. *Juxtaposition* is a strategy Wheatley employed to bridge her original and newfound cultures. Her ambivalence is evident, for example, in "To the University of Cambridge, in New-England" (qtd. in Hill 98) through her attraction to the plethora of gods in Greek mythology. Born and oriented into a polytheistic culture, Wheatley found it difficult to assimilate the constraints of Christianity, and never reconciled the kind treatment she received for her talents with the rampant racism she faced even after her manumission from slavery.

Emancipation, in fact, brought little relief from subjugation for many of the freed Africans in post-Civil War America. Many newly freedmen and freedwomen traveled North in hopes of reconnecting with separated family members, to seek better work opportunities, or to escape the mental and emotional vestiges of "our peculiar institution," as proclaimed by John C. Calhoun in his 1861 *Speech on Reception of Abolition Petitions*. Many more, however, remained in the South and sought work for remuneration and education for advancement. All sought better lives outside slavery.

Yet, new laws and regulations that prohibited their mobility and restricted their rights subsequently entrapped many freedmen and women. The South Carolina Black Codes, for example, continued even the language of slavery, with whites referred to as *masters*, and blacks known as *servants*. Similar examples of neo-slavery and involuntary servitude pervaded the South, creating a harsh racial climate as characterized by *Time* columnist Joe Klein: "I think one of the great absences in our society is a really truthful telling of the white terrorism, almost an al-Qaida-like terrorism, that was visited upon black people after the Civil War, the so-called 'redemption period'" (qtd. in Norris).

Setting the Stage for Racism

By and large, however, Blacks made significant gains in post-slavery America. Reconstruction followed the Civil War and the Civil War Amendments—the 13th ending slavery; the 14th or ‘naturalization amendment’ granting citizenship to newly freed slaves; and the 15th granting voting rights to black men. Reconstruction, or what has also been called “redemption,” occurred on many levels concurrently: physically, as the landscape of the South, particularly, was rebuilt in the wake of war’s devastation. Socially, as freedom removed the stigma of enslavement and diminished the privilege of whiteness. Economically, as whites were forced to compete with blacks for jobs that had previously been safeguarded. Politically, as enfranchisement made the black vote a force to be reckoned with. And culturally, as black families set up households and established traditions very different from those of their white counterparts.

The Freedmen’s Bureau, established to provide aid for the ‘refugees of war,’ helped many blacks, as well as white war veterans and their families, to secure food, clothing, and housing. The Great Migration enabled black families to reunite. Black schools were set up, and blacks poured into them seeking long-denied education. Blacks who had learned trades in slavery became entrepreneurial artisans and craftsmen. Black politicians were elected to Congress in states like Louisiana and Pennsylvania.

But those gains would not go unnoticed. A backlash occurred as vigilante groups sought to stem the tide of racial progress. Among those would be the Knights of the White Camellias; the White Citizens Councils; and most famously, the Ku Klux Klan. First formed in 1866 as a social fraternity or circle (from the Greek *kuklos*) by veterans of the Confederate Army, the Klan was driven out by the first Civil Rights Act, signed in 1871 by President Ulysses S. Grant. It resurfaced in Stone Mountain, Georgia in 1915 following the release of D. W. Griffith’s racially charged film, *The Birth of a Nation*.

The Klan operated under cover of darkness literally and figuratively, motivating blacks through fear and intimidation to stay “in their place.” Hooded Klansmen burned homes, churches, and schools of blacks. They attacked blacks believed to be criminals, “uppity,” or attracted to white women. Lynching, quartering, and castration were a few tactics for the torture and mutilation of black male bodies. Though still in existence today, the Klan’s popularity was usurped by groups like the Skinheads and the Aryan Nation, confraternities which, along with the Klan, are now classified as “hate groups.”

At the crossroads of freedom and the rise of racial terrorism, the path was then set for the race politics of Booker T. Washington (founder of Tuskegee Institute); W.E.B. DuBois (a founder of the NAACP); Ida Wells-Barnett (an anti-lynching crusader); Marcus Garvey (founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association); and Alain Locke, (whose anthology *The New Negro* marked the cultural shift from a slave mentality to an upwardly mobile Negro outlook). The “new Negro,” Locke suggested, would be a subject, not an object; would be urban, not rural; would be educated, not ignorant; and would be independent, rather than dependent, in all facets of life. Most importantly, the new Negro would be the “thinking” Negro. Art, Locke proposed, would be a primary vehicle for developing and expressing this new racial persona, and consciousness.

The New Negro

No one captured the spirit, if not the intent, of Locke’s credo better than the poet, Paul Lawrence Dunbar. Dunbar was a controversial figure in his time because he refused to practice a bifurcated form of art or philosophy, but embodied the best of both worlds—the old and the new. Dunbar is like a singer whose range goes from soprano to bass. At the high end, he demonstrates his ability to write with a light touch in down-home works like “A Negro Love Song,” a poem reminiscent of the ole plantation life, with the refrain “Jump back, baby, jump back!” (qtd. in Hill 608).

At the lower scales, Dunbar shows his deeper registers in his most famous work, “We Wear the Mask,” a poem urging Blacks to exercise restraint in exposing their pain to those who don’t and can’t understand their plight. And he displays a strong alto in works like “Sympathy,” the opening line of which Maya Angelou borrowed for the title of one of her autobiographical works, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

What makes Dunbar particularly controversial is his willingness to invoke, and even promote, the *minstrel* aspect of Black art. This tradition began early in slavery, mainly as an entertainment for whites seeking comic relief in the form of stereotypical portrayals of blacks. Performing in *blackface* (initially by white—then reluctantly, black—actors) was a key component of minstrelsy. Blackface performance entailed darkening of the face and hands using burnt cork or greasepaint; exaggerating the size of the lips and eyes; and wearing tattered finery (often torn tuxedos and top hats) to heighten the ridicule. Banjo strumming and feigned dialect enhanced the coonery.

Even with its demeaning aspects, some of those who utilized blackface technique considered their work art. Those include Thomas D. Rice, a white actor who performed the ditty “Jump Jim Crow” in blackface in 1828; Bert Williams, a black classically trained Shakespearean actor who made his fortune performing in blackface in the Vaudeville era; writers like Dunbar and Mark Twain; and the jazz great Louis Armstrong, who—aware of the irony—proudly honored the traditions of dressing in blackface and performing for Tribe of Zulu Mardi Gras parades in New Orleans.

The Harlem Renaissance, also called the first Black Arts Movement, occurred early in the 20th century. As early as the 1920’s and into the 40’s, writers like Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, James Weldon Johnson, Richard Wright, and James Baldwin produced works of fiction, poetry, and folklore with identity consciousnesses (race, and, in Baldwin’s case, homosexuality). *Identity* became a 20th century hallmark.

The dialectic of the *Black Aesthetic*, as defined in Addison Gayle's 1971 text —art-for-art's sake versus art-as-propaganda—was central in the production of works of the Black Arts period. Langston Hughes would write, "Most of my own poems are racial in theme and treatment" (qtd. in Hill 901). His ideas are a riff on DuBois' credo: "All art is propaganda, and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists" (qtd. in Hill 854).

Though many of these artists remained dependent to some extent on private patrons or government grants, they exercised their rights of self-expression to the extent of their individual circumstances. Zora Neale Hurston, as an example, for a time shared a sponsor with her friend and colleague, Langston Hughes. Charlotte Osgood Mason was a wealthy philanthropist and patron of the arts. Hurston was known to call her "Mother Mason," and to defer to her in other ways as well.

Mason had a preference for what might best be described as *la primitif* aspects of Black art. Having studied with the anthropologist Franz Boaz, Hurston too was attracted to the simple, common elements of black folk art and culture. She studied and wrote about the natives of her all-black community of Eatonville, Florida (near Miami) in works like *Lies and Other Tales* and *Spunk*.

Yet, at a certain point in her artistic development, Hurston began to feel exploited by Mason and constricted from moving beyond Mason's call for stereotyped representations of her race. Hurston left Mason's patronage and secured funding through the Works Progress Administration (WPA), part of FDR's New Deal. Hughes, too, was later funded by the WPA and, like Hurston, continued to seek authenticity in his visions of Black Art. The two authors collaborated on a joint production of a play called "Mule Bone" in 1931. That farcical work involves a cow's hock used as a weapon, and was not performed in the authors' lifetimes due to an altercation between Hurston and Hughes which caused a permanent rift in their friendship and working relationship.

A More Activist Rhetoric

The dawn of a new day was heralded by the human rights rhetoric of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael (later Kwame Ture), and the Black Panther activist, Angela Davis. King's *I Have a Dream* speech (the credo of nonviolence) as well as his *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, and the Nation of Islam's Minister X's *Speech to African Summit Conference—Cairo, Egypt* and his *Autobiography*, provided templates for activism. The Freedom Riders, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and other groups evoked that rhetoric to enforce the civil liberties of blacks as citizens, equal (and not separate) in the eyes and protective arms of the law. A second Civil Rights Act—preceded by one aimed at curbing the vigilante violence of the Ku Klux Klan—was on the horizon.

The second Black Arts Movement was a significant part of the Civil Rights revolution. It coincided with and accompanied sit-ins, marches, prayer meetings, stints in jail cells, and other organized political efforts. It included writers like Larry Neal, Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka), Sonia Sanchez, Don L. Lee (Haki R. Madhabuti), Ishmael Reed, and Nikki Giovanni. The movement's motto, "Black is beautiful" amplified the cry for "Black Power" made at a Mississippi rally by SNCC's Stokely Carmichael, and sung about by soul crooner, James Brown, in "Say it Loud (I'm Black and I'm Proud)."

That assertive in-your-face pride in their black heritage emboldened the newly franchised citizens, particularly following the signing by President Lyndon Johnson of the Voting Rights Act of 1964. The act would appear to have been redundant (voting rights having been granted to black male citizens by the 15th Amendment of 1870, and to all female citizens—regardless of race—by the 19th Amendment in 1920). Yet, the 1964 Voting Rights Act was a dramatic, and needed, step towards the long-sought affirmation of the moral and legal entitlement of blacks to participate in the American dream.

The modern Civil Rights and Black Power movements would forever change the face and direction of the South and have far-reaching impacts on race relations. After the deaths of the movements' two great leaders, Dr. King and Minister X, an even more militant ethos set in. What black citizens lost in leadership, they gained in anger, sense of purpose, and the resolve to not allow the gains made to deteriorate through dispersed actions. Yet, just as racism was becoming more nebulous, harder to pinpoint and target—yet no less virulent—a more diffused but equally determined focus on rights took the place of the organized structure of the movements.

The next-generation activists were Afro-donning “brothas” and “sistahs” in their African dashikis—forward-moving but also backward-looking— who demonstrated their American patriotism, along with their longing for a connection to their African heritage. Afrocentrism was the name given to this branch of the movement by Molefi Asante, director of the first doctoral program in African American Studies. Running parallel and yet apart from this strain would be post-Civil Rights artists and critics, including writers like Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Ralph Ellison, Terry McMillan, Ntozake Shange, Lucille Clifton, and Rita Dove. There were also visual artists like Lorna Simpson, Betye Saar, Howardena Pindell, and Renee Green.

That set of black artists would also be working synchronously with their counterparts in the white community. They included writers like Mark Twain, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, Truman Capote, Norman Mailer, Saul Bellow, and Flannery O'Connor. Several of those mainstream writers had links to the South and were engaged in writing about race relations to varying extents. Twain and O'Connor particularly continue to face scrutiny for their explorations and representations of black/white relations in the South, with O'Connor's being most likened to minstrelsy through her use of literary and even visual caricature, albeit less self-consciously so.

In addition, kindred spirits of other nationalities joined those American writers. Particularly those who were affected by the European War in Algeria and similar black/ white dynamics began addressing issues convergent with race relations and colonization, even when their topics took a more philosophical slant. Those often cited in critical race theory include writers like Jean-Paul Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* and *Anti-Semite and Jew*; Roland Barthes, particularly in his *Mythologies* and *Camera Lucida*; Edward Said, in *Orientalism* and “An Ideology of Difference;” Albert Memmi in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*; and Jacques Derrida in his “Racism’s Last Word” and *Writing and Difference*. There were also Britain’s Victor Turner and John Berger.

Race, Post-Race

Despite significant strides in social, political, and economic equality throughout the 60’s, 70’s, 80’s, and 90’s, *race* remains a relevant topic in the new millennium. This is true even in 2010, in the era of what some are calling a “post-racial” or color-blind society. Sarah Kershaw writes about the lessening of what psychologists describe as “racial anxiety” between whites and blacks with the historic presence of Barack Obama as America’s first black president (E5). According to Kershaw, Obama’s multi-racial and multicultural background has opened avenues of conversation that are described by one of her interview subjects as, “stilted and strained, even when there is no overt racism” and which another calls “a constant, constant struggle and process” (E1).

The early days of the Obama administration seemed to signal a moratorium on race. All of a sudden, according to Gilda Squire, “It’s like Obama supersedes race,” and thus, many of Obama’s supporters saw cause for hope that his prominence on the world stage would serve to significantly alleviate racial tensions (E1). The “Obama effect” (Trebay <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/15/fashion/13diary.html?em>) is only one of the developing phenomena in new millennial “post-race” race relations.

In a similar vein, there is the *post-Black*, a form of activist rhetoric which seeks to dismantle racial classification altogether. Thelma Golden, former assistant curator of the Whitney and Metropolitan Museums and now Chief Curator of the Studio Museum of Harlem, along with the artist Glenn Ligon, has introduced this term into the dialogue on race. Golden explains that “post-Black” refers specifically to the work of younger artists, those who may be subsumed under hip-hop culture, in all its multicultural and multinational aspects and manifestations, and who may not want to feel pigeon-holed by the label of “Black art” (Zabunyan 245). Ligon counts himself among these artists.

The hip-hop generation puts its own spin on the post-black enterprise in that theirs is among the most assertive and cohesive post-racial rationales. Their ethos of sampling—borrowing and mixing melodies and lyrics into a single work—carries over from lyrics and “beats” to cultures. Its aims of inclusion reflect the goal of dissociation from racial classification as remedy for the double-edged sword of racism—which cuts both ways: white-on-black and black-on-white. In “Color-Blind Ideology and the Cultural Appropriation of Hip-Hop,” Jason Rodriguez examines the growing presence of white youths on the hip-hop scene, noting that part of their rationale is to remove racial coding from this genre of music and to emphasize more race-neutral themes (645).

To be sure, post-racial discourse did not begin with hip-hop, nor with the arrival of Obama on the national scene. In a 2007 *Rhetoric Review* article, David G. Holmes locates the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon Presidential debates as “a site for exploring one crucial stage in the evolution of color-blind rhetoric” (26). He contextualizes his argument by quoting historian Numan Bartley, who writes, “Nixon thought that if you didn’t talk about the subject of civil rights, it would go away, while Kennedy thought that if you did talk about the subject...it would go away” (25) [Figure 1]. This rhetorical dichotomy typifies new-millennial postracialism and reinforces its push-me / pull-me dimensions.



Figure 1: Screen Shots of Televised Kennedy-Nixon Presidential Debates, 1960

Politics is rife with such examples, a more recent one occurring in the 2009 New York City mayoral race between incumbent Michael Bloomberg and newcomer Bill Thompson. Thompson's scant presence in TV ads and reluctance to self-identify as a black candidate situated him as a postracial candidate, but also contributed to lack of support among black voters, who made up 25% of the city's population. Bloomberg's supporters, however, did not share Thompson's reticence, and used coded language about crime and "the wrong political leadership" to racially profile him (Dominus A25). Idealizing race-neutrality as a "sophisticated state to which this country has evolved" worked against Thompson by obfuscating real social issues, a stance that contributes to an "undertheorizing" of color-blind discourse as a unique genre, writes Holmes (26).

Moreover, while showcasing parts of this premise as optimistic—that deemphasizing race may diminish its negative power—Kershaw exposes its inherent paradox when she points instead to the persistence of "strategic colorblindness" as a contributor to "toxic" race relations. She cites two studies which find that this tendency, usually on the part of whites, to avoid broaching the subject of race, is viewed by blacks as "evidence of prejudice" (E5). Even when the motives are conciliatory, silence on the subject of race can backfire and cause more animus. Part of the reason for this, as Jason Rodriguez explains, is that "Indeed...Whites tend to be color-blind to their own racial privilege." He further contextualizes the failure of post-race rhetoric when he writes,

Color-blind ideology is a remarkably flexible set of ideas that are used in a variety of ways to deny the reality of inequality. It draws on abstract, liberal notions of equality ('equal opportunity for all') to disconnect race from the power relations in which inequality and racial discourses are embedded. (646)

Other critics have had far blunter responses to the suggestion of race-neutral consciousness. "Ain't nothing post-racial about the United States of America," writes Lawrence Bobo, W.E.B. DuBois Professor of the Social Sciences at Harvard. He makes this observation in his editorial, "What Do You Call a Black Man with a Ph.D.?" written in response to the recanted arrest of his good friend and Harvard colleague, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. on charges of disorderly conduct at his own Harvard-provided residence.

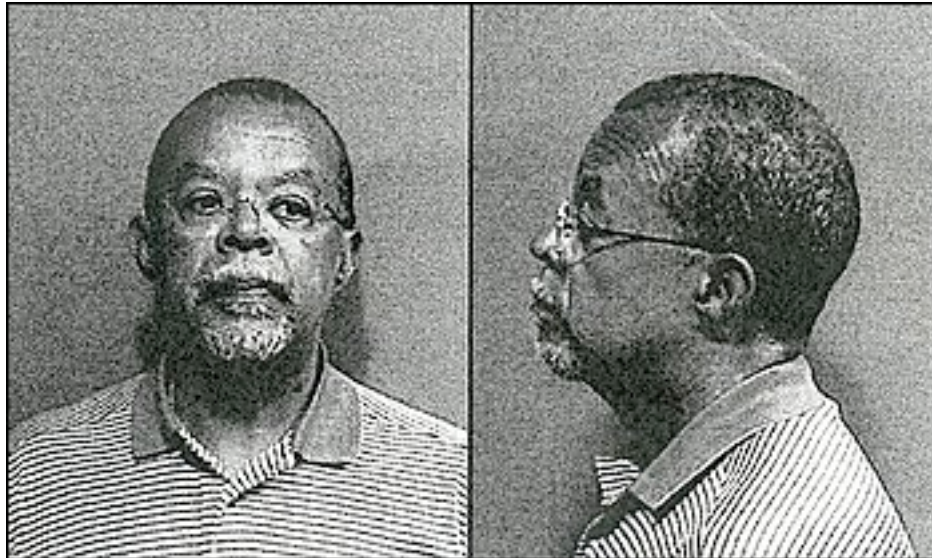


Figure 2: Henry Louis Gates, Jr. | AP Photo / Cambridge Police Department

The July 23, 2009 Gates calamity was far beyond ironic, given Gates' status as America's preeminent contemporary scholar on race. The *Washington Post* reported:

The news was parsed and Tweeted, rued and debated. This was, after all Henry "Skip" Gates: Summa cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Yale. MacArthur "genius grant" recipient. Acclaimed historian, Harvard professor and PBS documentarian. One of *Time* magazine's "25 Most Influential Americans" in 1997. Holder of 50 honorary degrees.... If this man can be taken away by police officers from the porch of his own home, what does it say about the treatment that average blacks can expect in 2009?

(J. Washington, "Analysis")

Originally called to the campus-situated residence by an observer who claimed to be witnessing a case of unlawful breaking and entering, Cambridge police officers believed that they were encountering “two big black men” (Gates and his driver) in the process of wrongdoing. Gates had had trouble entering his residence because of a jammed lock that required his driver to use some force to enter. Yet, even once Gates proved his residency by showing his Harvard faculty ID and Massachusetts driver’s license, the officers continued to question and seemingly accuse him of committing some crime. His extreme agitation with the officers is what ultimately led to his arrest.

Immediately following the incident, Gates was both vocal and unequivocal in his perception of being subjected to racist treatment in his interactions with, and subsequent arrest by, the Massachusetts police officers. In his interview with Dayo Olopade on his *The Roots* blog, Gates characterized the situation as “the worst racial profiling I’ve ever heard of,” and insisted,

I’m outraged. I can’t believe that an individual policeman on the Cambridge police force would treat any African-American male this way, and I am astonished that this happened to me; and more importantly I’m astonished that it could happen to any citizen of the United States, no matter what their race. And I’m deeply resolved to do and say the right things so that this cannot happen again.... Of course, it will happen again, but ... I want to do what I can so that every police officer will think twice before engaging in this kind of behavior... (qtd. in Olopade)

Obama, who is variously identified in Kershaw’s article as a “counter-stereotypical African-American,” “an individual who transcends race,” and “not really black” has insisted that race is something in America’s history “...we’ve never really worked through” (E5). He initially agreed with Gates’ characterization of the incident, calling his friend’s arrest ‘stupid’ and joking that he himself might have “been shot” (<http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/story?id=8153681>). Yet only days later, succumbing to public pressure from supporters of law enforcement, the President recanted, inviting Gates and arresting Officer Jim Crowley to the White House for beer and conciliation.

And Gates' was not the first awkward episode in the "postracial" Obama administration. On February 18, 2009, during a Black History Month speech given at the Justice Department, Eric Holder, the nation's first black—and then newly-confirmed—Attorney General, had called America "essentially a nation of cowards" when it comes to matters of race relations. According to ABC News reporters Pierre Thomas and Jason Ryan, his "head-turning comments" chided Americans for lack of constructive dialogue:

Though race-related issues continue to occupy a significant portion of our political discussion, and though there remain many unresolved racial issues in this nation, we, average Americans, simply do not talk enough with each other about things racial. This is truly sad. Given all that we as a nation went through during the civil rights struggle, it is hard for me to accept that the result of those efforts was to create an America that is more prosperous, more positively race-conscious, and yet is voluntarily socially segregated.

Later, speaking with reporters about the address, Holder added, "we have to have the guts" to talk about race. "It is an easy thing not to talk about these things. It is a painful thing to discuss them" (qtd. in Thomas and Ryan). Americans' cowardice, he suggested, came in the form of taking the easy way out and capitulating to the caginess that has become emblematic of race rhetoric in public, as well as in many private, venues.

Holder's remarks about race were made within a context of reactivating the Department's Civil Rights Division, to rebuke the agency's underutilization. He stated, "It's a division that has not gotten the attention it deserves, the resources it deserves, and people have not been given a sense of mission." He also noted that Obama's pre-election *Speech on Race* had presented an opportunity for beginning the healing of racial divisions that remain in our country, despite great strides that have been made. He acknowledged, "The fact that we have an African-American attorney general, an African-American president, I think, is extremely significant. But," he added, "it is not an indication that all of the problems that we have confronted as a nation over the years are now resolved" (<http://abcnews.go.com/TheLaw/story?id=6905255&page=1>).

Race: Deal or No Deal?

Reactions to Holder's comments reflect a recurring duality in racial discourse. Michele Norris' NPR interview with racial scholar Michael Eric Dyson and columnist Joe Klein reflects this continual schism. Klein called Holder's address "a cowardly speech," adding "you can contrast that speech with a truly great speech about race, which was made by Barack Obama last April in Philadelphia, where he laid out specifically the misapprehensions on all sides." Dyson countered, stating, "We are mis-served by the desire for a kind of specificity, when the broad landscape against which [Holder] pitched his argument, and the canvas upon which he drew a very compelling portrait of American race relations, is the very thing that we have to be honest about."

Their exchange highlights a fatal disjoint in perceptions in that, while isolated incidents can be explained away as not *racial* per se, the net effect of accumulating issues with racial subtexts is toxic. In the interview, Norris observed, "On one hand, you could look at the Obama speech and conclude that he's saying America needs to get past race. And that Holder, on the other hand, seems to be saying that America needs to deal with race and have a sort of more active engagement in talking about it, in order to get past it." Klein seized that opportunity to address a specific issue of 'reverse racism':

Barack Obama himself raised the question of whether his daughter should be, you know, eligible for affirmative action. Now, affirmative action is a bone in the throat of white working class Americans who are right now really suffering economically. If you want to have the conversation, it has to be equal on all sides. It can't just be white people acknowledging the disgraceful history of terror visited upon blacks.

Conceding that point, Dyson insisted,

What we're speaking about is the issue of race. I agree with Mr. Klein that there's an enormously changed racial landscape, that there are complex interactions among the races along axes of class and gender, and sexual orientation as well.... [but] I would suggest that when black people are subjected to retail profiling, or racial profiling or police brutality, where the arbitrary loss of life could happen at any moment, that there are forms of terror that persist. (qtd. in Norris)

Helene Cooper is a diplomatic correspondent for the *New York Times* based in Washington, DC. Her frequent coverage of White House politics includes issues like Affirmative Action, a subject she confronts in a personal way in “Meet the New Elite, Not Like the Old.” There she confesses, “I was one of its beneficiaries. A 17-year-old from Monrovia, Liberia. I was one of some 200 black freshmen at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1983.” Along with that admission, she reveals the accompanying anxiety experienced by her and many such recipients. No doubt, there is plenty of anxiety about Affirmative Action to go around.

At least three groups hold major stakes in this unease. *Recipients* of race-based hiring and, more commonly, college admissions policies, are often plagued by feelings of inadequacy. They may perceive (and their perceptions are often reinforced by a second group—the *public*) that their academic qualifications are inferior and that they are impostors who are perpetrating some grand deception. Even some of the *developers and implementers* of Affirmative Action policies can share that apprehension. Cooper quotes Nicholas Lemann, Dean of Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism:

The idealistic version of why these universities embraced racial affirmative action is that they said, ‘Hey, we’re in the business of training elites, it would be better for America if there were a diverse elite.... The cynical version of why they did this is they said, ‘We can’t control this country, it’s becoming too diverse, we need to socialize the brighter minorities and make them more like us.

Cooper identifies with the catch-22 characterized by Lemann as “double consciousness.” For her, it permits blacks who have benefitted from affirmative action programs to “flow more easily between the world which their skin color bequeathed them and the world which their college degree opened up for them.” She quotes Gates as observing, one week after his arrest, that “I can’t wear my Harvard gown everywhere I go. We—all of us in the crossover generation—have multiple identities, and being black trumps all of those other identities.” And this is not strictly a matter of choice.

Cooper misses the opportunity to note that the concept of *double-consciousness* well pre-dates any 21st century responses to Affirmative Action. W.E.B DuBois explicated and popularized the term at the turn of the 20th. DuBois is an ancestor of Gates, by ethnicity as well as by educational affiliation. The first black to be awarded a doctorate degree from Harvard, DuBois went on to become a philosopher; sociologist; and writer of fiction, poetry, biography, and autobiography. His 1895 dissertation, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America, 1538-1870*, was the first volume in the Harvard Historical Series. A student of George Santayana and William James among other notable Harvard luminaries, DuBois experienced first-hand, and under far more trying circumstances, the ire of his white Harvard peers. In 1900, he would decree that “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line,” and later, in his seminal collection of essays—*The Souls of Black Folk*—he explains,

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, —a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, —an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (qtd. in Hill 738)

DuBois writes knowingly and convincingly about racial prejudice, calling it “the shadow of vast despair” which darkens a black man’s soul (740). This shadow has not escaped Obama, who, as a genuine African-American (a Kenyan father), self-identifies as black. As part of the black elite—the “talented tenth” that DuBois charged with uplifting the race—the President is not exempt from racial prejudice or efforts to muddle his race and ethnicity. Still, he resists submersion by the specter of racism. His goal, he has told members of his administration, is to be seen “as a president who happens to be black rather than the nation’s first black president” (qtd in Zeleny and Rutenberg).

Post Post-Race

Remember a long, long time ago—it almost seems like a recession and a half ago—when Barack Obama first came (via Kenya, of course)...to power? Remember how certain hope-doped commentators predicted that his election would finally allow Americans to have a frank discussion about race? [Figure 3] Something different and less hope-inducing has happened. His presidency has allowed us to talk *around* race, to talk about it constantly and subliminally without ever truly discussing it...and this causes untold, and largely unspoken, problems.
Jim Nelson, "Letter from the Editor," GQ

So the honeymoon is over for Obama and for all who expected an end to racial animus. In some extreme instances their optimism, rather than prompting progress, has yielded subversion and regression, as evidenced by vocal and visual expressions of xenophobia publicly directed at Obama. Nelson notes this when he refers to an angry white woman who attended a town hall meeting on healthcare and held on to an American flag "with tribal intensity, [and] riled up the crowd with her question: 'Why are you people ignoring his birth certificate?' Then she birthed her own little shriek: 'I want my country baaaaack!'"(108). She is only one of a persistent minority who still doggedly refute Obama's Hawaiian birth—and thereby American citizenship—insisting that he, like his father, is an African native and thereby disqualified to be president.

And there have been other signs of racial and ethnic intolerance, prompting political commentators and media analysts to speculate on the racial implications. For instance, *New York Times* reporters, Barbara Ehrenreich and Dedrick Muhammad write:

What do you get when you combine the worst economic downturn since the Depression with the first black president? A surge of white racial resentment, loosely disguised as a populist revolt. An article on the Fox News Web site has put forth the theory that health reform is a stealth version of reparations for slavery: whites will foot the bill and, by some undisclosed mechanism, blacks will get all the care. President Obama, in such fantasies, is a dictator [Figure 4] and, in one image circulated among the anti-tax, anti-health reform "tea parties," he is depicted as a befeathered African witch doctor with little tusks coming out of his nostrils. When you're going down, as the white middle class has been doing for several years now, it's all too easy to imagine that it's because someone else is climbing up over your back...
(<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/13/opinion/13ehrenreich.html>)



Figure 3: Obama Presidential Campaign Poster, 2008



Robyn Beck, AFP/Getty Images

Figure 4: Obama as Socialist Joker, 2009, Robyn Beck, Getty Images

Moreover, it is becoming more and more apparent that race-dodging is not a viable rhetorical solution to racial tensions. Kobena Mercer, a cultural critic who works on the politics of representation in the visual arts of the African diaspora, has observed a more assertive model for today's Black artists. While his own work is part of an emerging line of inquiry into "post-identitarian"—post-racial and post-Black—cultural politics, he borrows from Herman Gray's theory of *hyperblackness* in critiquing lightning-rod artists like the silhouettist Kara Walker. These hyperblack artists do not subscribe to an affirmative action or post-racial ethos, but are uniquely and self-consciously black. They form a third wave of America's Black Arts Movement and appear to wrestle less with the racial detritus of double-consciousness. They are racial politicians who are not afraid to be confrontational both within and outside of the race. Of them, Mercer writes,

I am excited by the way young African American artists, such as Michael Ray Charles, Ellen Gallagher, and Kara Walker, play fast and loose with the stereotypical grotesque. It shows that **art has the power to undo ideological effects of representation**. (Mercer 45) [emphasis added]

Yet Mercer peppers his pride and admiration for their artistic bravado with skepticism about the aftermath and potential repercussions such messages might send nationally and internationally. He expresses his doubts, adding:

But I am concerned that aspects of North American (mis) translations of cultural studies into minoritarian celebrationism hinder our ability to understand the massive shifts in relations of race and representation in the post-Affirmative Action era. The new regime of compulsory visibility associated with hyperblackness decouples modernist conventions of culture and politics. (45)

Within the arena of hyperblackness, race takes center stage, and art is used to un- and then re-inscribe, rather than eradicate, racial identification. Such "politics of art" are considered by, for example, Walter Benjamin, who takes up the dialectics of art as potential foil or tool for, in his case, Fascism, and in the case of hyperblackness, racism. In "Works of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin describes that dilemma as the "politicization of art" (242) versus the "aestheticization of politics" (240).

Walker's politics unapologetically serve her art. Her work defies victimization, highlighting the flawed humanity of all involved, complicating rote notions of who is good or evil. It is at the same time historically-based, self-referential, and politically pointed. The incorporation of familiar tropes and images serves as a touchstone, but there is no firm ground beneath. Her re-appropriation for caricature and modification destabilizes viewers, providing no comfort zone for standing, and no safety net for falling. But comfort has never been a hallmark of race rhetorics; why would it be now?

Inspired by the rhetoric of his presidency, as well as by Obama's own rhetoric (http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2008/03/18/us/politics/20080318_OBAMA_GRAPHIC.html), my purpose here is to negotiate between theories and methodologies regarding racial discourse. As Elizabeth Lasch-Quinn observes, "This [Obama's rhetoric] shakes up the status quo because here we have someone who is willing to talk about race, but doesn't talk about it in the usual ways. Once we have one person doing that, we now have a model for how other people can do that" (qtd. in Kershaw E5). And that model is one that, even with its dissenters, is being widely embraced.

My hope is to seize upon this opening to engage in dialogue as a necessary means for a national soul-searching on race. I am encouraged by the myriad ways to engage the country's racial consciousness, and hope to invoke a concession that our collective racial wounds still need healing. My project is inspired by Walker's work and entails drawing upon the historical schema of the *silhouette* to amplify its broader uses. Generally, I am utilizing this tool from the tradition of visual rhetorics and re-contextualizing it for verbal/literary rhetoric as well, specifically as I see this principle at work in the artistry of O'Connor. With the re-emergence of its popularity in the visual arts, the need for further understanding prompts closer investigation into what this representational model can teach us about race relations—in and out of the classroom.

It is important to here note that while racial profiling bears much in common with religious persecution, these are in fact different forms of “othering,” and Edward Said can be especially helpful in contrasting these traits. In other words, the attention focused upon members of Arab and Islamic communities in the wake of the 9/11 terrorism may look and feel similar to race prejudice, but is a distinctly unique affair. Likewise, instances of racism in South America and some Caribbean countries are often in the news. Particularly, the recent earthquake in Haiti, and a slew of race-related events, has highlighted such cases. However, the confounding amalgam of culture, ethnicity, and biology in the U.S. differentiate racism here from forms of racism there. In the same way, discrimination based upon sexual orientation has unique characteristics that are examined in other venues, and will not be addressed in this study.

Finally, while racism is a pan global phenomenon, its persistence in America as an outgrowth of the mass importation of African slaves makes it a phenomenon worthy of dedicated rhetorical study. Moreover, its persistence almost two hundred years after slavery’s end speaks to the need for a deeper understanding of its role in the formation of our national character, and the rhetoric we use to express it. Accordingly, the emphasis here is strictly upon black/white social interactions in North America—upon representations of blackness and whiteness—and how the trope of the silhouette functions as a form of profiling, or meta-coding, in the racial narrative of the US.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SILHOUETTE AS *MANIRHETORICAL* TROPE FOR RACE

In locating the silhouette as a major trope in the discourses on race—as a binding metaphor for black/white relations—I am adding to the rhetorical lexicon by applying the term *manirhetorical* to illustrate the unique and adaptive features of the silhouette—its suitability to operate through various media and to accommodate multiple tasks. Establishing the silhouette as a form of *manirhetorics* is instrumental in highlighting its modal uniqueness and racial significance. By operating *manirhetorically*—that is, in a multilayered and far-flung manner—the silhouette collapses visual, verbal, and oral rhetorics into an ideal form for racial representation—a manifold genre within genres.

The silhouette is a powerful venue for racial dialogue because its inherent multimodality allows it to be read, heard, and viscerally experienced in ways that the viewing of traditional artworks may not afford. From a visual standpoint, the back-and-foregrounding that is transacted through this technique of profiling and outlining is a key feature of its multidimensional form. Used for shaping as well as for creating an inverse/mirror image—absence as well as presence—it is representational, but also self-referential. Rhetorically, the silhouette's modal adaptability easily lends itself to deep analysis. It is multifunctional, and performs its own critique. It is dialectical in that its shadow nature opens venues for reflection upon the *self*, as well as insight into *others*.

Tracing the history of the silhouette reveals its light as well as dark sides. Such literal and metaphorical contrasts help further explain its *manirhetorical* significance for representing and analyzing racial differences. Its provenance is the stuff of myth and legend, and its praxes predate its naming, therefore complicating a smooth line of derivation. It has had, according to A. Hyatt Mayor, “a peculiar place in history” (50).

Artist and art critic, Virginia Whitehill (1898-1953), asserts that silhouette is often associated with “the profile portrait, offspring of Egypt,” (49) Greek vases, and antique coins and medals. As far back as 4000 BC, Egyptian peoples were producing works in painted pottery, glazed ceramics, and stone vases which carried the likenesses of prominent citizens and depicted particular themes and events from their cultures. Particular examples of this Egyptian art include Predynastic Naqada I (c. 4000-3500 BC) and II (c. 3500-3100 BC) period carvings from bone, stone, or ivory. Such carved figurines were often placed in burial tombs and depicted thematic types such as fertility goddesses or regal males [Figure 5]. Some of these figures are relatively generic, “simplified to the point of abstraction” and invite multiple readings (Phaidon 39).



Figure 5: Goddess and Regal Male Figures (Phaidon 32)

In other instances, the subject of the portraiture commands particular attention. For example, Meni (*Menes* in Greek) is the mythical king with whom the ancient Egyptians began their official history. As the first pharaoh, it is his image which is believed to be featured in royal garb on the Narmer Palette, also known as the Great Hierakonpolis Palette, dating from approximately 3000 BC. Some legends hold that Menes and Narmer are one and the same ruler. It has been recorded that King Narmer (c. 3000-2972 BC) presented this palette to the temple at Kom el-Ahmar (Hierakonpolis) in present day Al Minya, Egypt. Narmer's name and likeness are featured on both sides of the flat, carved siltstone panel along with other human figures and animal images. Archaeologists and historians have referred to the Palette as "the first historical document in the world."¹



Figure 6: Hierakonpolis Palette

¹ See, for example, Bob Brier's *Daily Life of the Ancient Egyptians*, 1999.

Such artworks of the period often had “cult value,” as well as utility—as described by Walter Benjamin in “Works of Art in Mechanical Reproduction.” However, the Narmer Palette [Figure 6] retains the shape but not the function of others used for preparing ritual paint. The palette also features some signature elements of Egyptian art, particularly two-dimensional representations. According to Phaidon Press Limited,

Figures are arranged in registers on a single ground line, and humans are shown as composite images: the face in profile, with only one eye, the shoulders in front view, the waist in three-quarter view, the arms and legs again in profile. These conventions would remain in use throughout the rest of ancient Egyptian history. (50)

A Greek vase from a later artistic period shows similar composition principles to those of Egyptian profile portraiture, but applied on a smooth, round surface [Figure 7].



Figure 7: Classical Greek Krater, 380-400 BC²

² Cotter, Holland. Art Review, “Worshipping Women.” *New York Times*, December 18, 2008. nytimes.com.

Mayor, former curator of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, expounds upon these principles of the silhouette in antiquity. According to Mayor, “The Egyptians and Greeks, great lovers of clarity, found that a head in painting or relief is most readily recognized as a head if turned to show the unmistakable profile outline of the nose, lips, chin....” (“Silhouettes” 50). He alludes to the *manirhetorical* aspects of silhouette by suggesting that the schema is at the same time both content and form, method and manifestation. In addition, he notes the almost-photographic value of the silhouette when he writes, “The Egyptians and Greeks insisted on being clear to the point of drawing the brow, nose, lips, and chin in side face to make up an unmistakable head” (“Intro” xi). The hallmark of accuracy in representation for them was the profile.

Silhouette and the Theory of Forms

Yet, one of the best examples of the silhouette’s powers of mis-representation occurs in Plato’s allegory of the cave [Figure 8]. In his *Republic*, Plato (428-347 BC) builds a case for the indispensability of philosophers in helping society understand “truth.” By way of contrast, he constructs and describes a scenario in which the inhabitants of a dark subterranean cave mistake for images of “realities” the shadows of figures cast by human forms reflected by firelight. Leading into a dialogue between his brother Glaucon and his fellow philosopher, Socrates, Plato warns, “And now...let me show in a figure how far our nature is enlightened or unenlightened” (VII: 513-14).

Shadows of images and echoes of sounds fill the cave, but some of these former “prisoners”—constricted by hand, foot, and sightline inside the cave—are released. They make it above ground and are able to view images and objects that are more in line with unmediated truth and reality than the shadows thrown upon the cave walls being viewed by those who remain inside. They are even able—after a period of adjustment—to see the sun “as he is,” and would have difficulty seeing shadows from that point on.

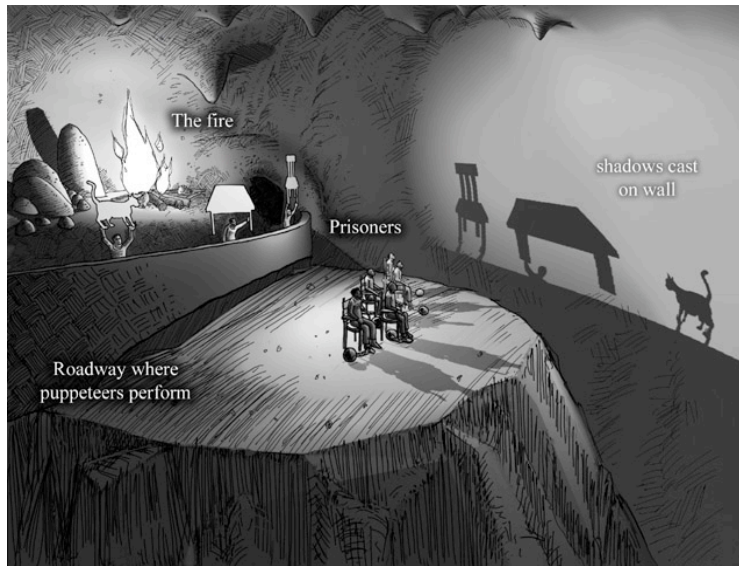


Figure 8: Illustration of Plato's Cave from *The Republic*

Physiognomy of Silhouette

Another philosopher, Aristotle (384=322 BC), is said to have written about Greek attention to the figure in *On Physiognomics*. That work emphasizes the importance of attention to the intricate details of the face and head, and calls physiognomy “an ingenious science...by which the inclinations and dispositions of every creature are understood” (<http://www.exclassics.com/arist/arist62.htm>). The doctrine ascribed to Aristotle links physiognomy with other fields that seek to study relations of signs to psyche, such as astrology, astronomy, and phrenology. No feature of the face escapes attention; all connote something significant about character, including sense of humor.

Accordingly, understanding the history of physiognomy is central to the study of the silhouette. The term *physiognomy* has global origins. It derives from late Middle English and the Old French *phisonomie*, by way of Medieval Latin from the Greek *phusiognōmonia*, ‘judging of a man's nature (by his features),’ and based on *gnōmōn*, ‘a judge, interpreter.’ Other etymologies are as straightforward as this: Gk. *physis*, nature and *gnosis*, knowledge. A common interpretation is *knowledge of the nature*.

In “Physiognomics in the Roman Empire,” Elizabeth C. Evans associates “the study of interpreting character from personal appearance,” with Aristotle’s study of rhetoric as well as his physiognomics. According to Evans, Aristotle’s is “the first systematic treatment of such material that has come down to us,” though she believes that the two sections of this “pseudo-Aristotelean handbook” were likely not original to Aristotle, but composed by two different writers in his school, or under his influence (280). And while Evans asserts that what has been characterized as this “folk science” of physiognomy does not originate with Aristotle, she quotes him as saying, “The soul and body appropriate to the same kind always go together, and this shows that a specific body involves a specific mental character” (277).

Rather, it is the 5th century rhetor, Pythagoras, often called the “father of numbers,” who Evans calls the “inventor” of physiognomy. Of Pythagoras she writes,

At the very outset he ‘physiognomized’ the young men who presented themselves for instruction. That word means to inquire into character and dispositions of men by an inference drawn from their facial appearance and expression, and from the form and bearing of their whole body. Then, when he had examined a man and found him suitable, he at once gave orders that he should be admitted. (“Study” 96)

Still, she offers, “Galen [of the ‘doctrine of the Four Humours’] maintains that Hippocrates really established it as a science.... It was always closely associated with the science of medicine” (“Physiognomics” 277). Aristotle’s *Historia Animalium* influenced Galen’s physiognomics. But mainly Galen’s ideas on ethnological physiognomy, according to Evans, follow “his master, ‘the divine Hippocrates’...a discussion largely based on the Hippocratic essay, *Airs, Waters, and Places*” (282). That work advanced a common belief that the four bodily fluids of blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm coordinated with the seasons—Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter, respectively. A common belief also held that these sets operated in conjunction with the four natural elements of earth, wind, fire, and water, and that they influenced human nature.

In *Airs, Waters, and Places*, Hippocrates (the “father of medicine” and founder of the Hippocratic Oath) includes analysis of the elements and the influences of environment upon inhabitants. The essay is taxonomical in its references to the ways races are affected by specific natural conditions. In it, Hippocrates draws a seemingly ad hoc set of associations, particularly in his discussions of the European, Egyptian, Scythian, and Asian races, of which he writes,

The other races in Europe differ from one another, both as to stature and shape, owing to the changes of the seasons, which are very great.... I think the figures of Europeans differ more than those of the Asiatics.... for vitiations in the semen occur in its coagulations more frequently during frequent changes in the seasons than where they are alike and equable. And the same may be said of their dispositions... therefore I think the inhabitants of Europe more courageous than those of Asia. (<http://classics.mit.edu/Hippocrates/airwatpl.mb.txt> Part 23)

Such character “typing” is a strong component of the physiognomics advanced by Hippocrates and his mentee, Galen. *Epidemiai*, another work of Hippocrates, “marks a further advance in physiognomical observation” and groups several combinations of physical features that constitute various types of character, writes Geneva Misener (104).



Figure 9: Mural of Galen and Hippocrates, 12th Century, Anagni, Italy

Physiognomy and Iconography

Further, Evans associates the art of physiognomy with the sophistic rhetor Suetonius. She writes, “The iconistic descriptions of the Roman Emperors in the pages of Suetonius’s *De Vita Caesarum*, a regular part of the *schemata* of those biographies, were more or less influenced by the doctrines of the physiognomists on the interpretation of character from the physique...” (“Study” 96). Reinforcing the role of physiognomy in literature—written portraits—she adds to the *manirhetorics* of profile iconography,

It may be illuminating...to examine the comments of certain representative prose writers of this period, both Greek and Roman, to study their general references to physiognomical theory and the types of portraits found in their writings which are capable of physiognomical analysis. (96)

Another prominent rhetor who participated in physiognomics was Polemo (123 A.D), “one of the distinguished leaders of the New Sophistic” (97). He did not underestimate the value of the science. “Nor,” Evans insists, “does Polemo neglect the branch of study by which various races are distinguished through differences of appearance and character” (102). In this way physiognomics produces early instances of racial profiling.

Later, physiognomy wends its way through Alexandrian biographical studies. Evans notes, “Iconistic portraiture belongs to all classical literature.” What she calls “portrait sculpture” has, she believes, contributed to likenesses in literature. These elaborate descriptions have also been used for identifying Egyptian papyri through Alexandrian biographers, who, in turn, comprise another source of interest in “photographic description” (“Physiognomics” 279). The convergence of these rhetorical operations signals a landmark development in physiognomy and the silhouette—a simultaneously visual and verbal medium. It also reinforces its racial relevance, as in a “proclamation of rewards for the capture of runaway slaves...in Egypt...Greece and Italy” (Misener 102). This synchronicity was drawn through a method of photographic description, the form of the *iconismos* (99).

Although the term has fallen out of vogue in rhetorics since the early 1900's, the *iconism* had great relevance when Misener was writing "Iconistic Portraits" in 1924. She describes the *iconism* as "a terse asyndetic description of personal appearance designed either as a means of legal identification or as an ornament of style" (97). Strictly defined, according to Misener, the literary device provides "a description both of the behavior and the appearance" particularly of Greek and Roman slaves. "The *iconismos*," she writes, "is used...in the physiognomical interpretation of character and approaches the *characterismos* in function." She cites the *Characteres* of Theophrastus, a peripatetic, as a prime example of the form (98).

In substance, Misener solidifies the *manirhetorical* aspects of physiognomy vis-à-vis the silhouette as an *iconistic* form which bridges the physical, political, visual, and verbal depictions of race. She writes, "Strange features of barbarian races are swiftly outlined in iconistic form" (116). The *iconism* is based in reality, but also invites an interpretive turn, juxtaposing methods of scientific sorting with social stereotype. Misener notes that, "the literary *iconismos* had its origin in real life," (103) and illustrates the point when she writes,

The modern parallels, the advertisements of escaped prisoners and criminals attach similar iconistic descriptions to their photographs. In a Greek papyrus of 145 B.C., a runaway slave is thus advertised... followed by descriptions of his clothes and the amount of the reward. (102)

In addition, the *iconism* makes room for literary embellishment, for creating what Misener calls "fictitious portraiture" (109). Harkening back to Aristotle's rhetoric of physiognomy, the *characterismos*, or *effictio*, operates alongside the *ethopoeia*. Misener explains their parallel functions:

It was...the biological and psychological researches of Aristotle that gave the greatest impetus to the study of character and to human portraiture. The *characteres* of Theophrastus and other peripatetics, the literary biography founded by the same school, their physiognomical manuals are, in great part, the applied ethics of the master. (107)

In the 1st century, Pliny the Elder (A.D. 23-79) commented on “physiognomy as indicative of the moral disposition” (qtd. in Evans, “Physiognomics” 279) and referred to Aristotle’s theories about physical signs used for determining duration of life. Moreover, the earliest literary reference to the silhouette is in Pliny the Elder’s story of Dibutade, as recounted within the approximately 160 volumes of his *Natural History*. The gist of the Elder’s myth is that Dibutade, a Corinthian maid, outlined the shadow of her lover upon the wall to preserve his likeness [Figure 10]. Butade, her father, then filled the lover’s outline with clay and fired it with the rest of his pots as further consolation for his daughter’s longing. Pliny the elder used the myth to illustrate the origins of clay modeling.

The connection between the wall tracing of the Corinthian maid and the art of the silhouette was first drawn in 1771. George Levitine, Professor Emeritus and former Head of the University of Maryland Art Department, writes:

In his most interesting and well documented article, Mr. Rosenblum suggests that Alexander Runciman’s *The Origin of Painting* (1771) is “likely to be the first work to proclaim this new iconographic tradition (of Dibutade). Referring to ‘The Origins of Drawing’ by Girodet, Mr. Rosenblum expresses the opinion that this painter could have been attracted by the legend of Dibutade because of its ‘erotic’ aspects and its analogy with the art of the silhouette. (329-330)



Figure 10: The Corinthian Maid, Joseph Wright (1782-84)

These published instances were followed by an 1801 lecture given by the German artist Henry Fuseli (1741-1825) at the Royal Academy in London. Fuseli had studied art in Zurich, where he was a classmate of Johann Kaspar Lavater, a key figure in silhouette history. In his address to the academy, Fuseli made sly reference to Lavater's work:

If ever legend deserved our belief, the amorous tale of the Corinthian maid, who traced the shade of her departing lover by the secret lamp, appeals to our sympathy to grant it. ...The first essays of the art were skiagrams, simple outlines of a shade, similar to those which have been introduced to vulgar use by the students and parasites of Physiognomy, under the name Silhouettes. (qtd. in Levine 330)

The "parasites of Physiognomy" foreshadow the silhouette controversy. At the same time, they reinforce the visual and verbal interplay of the medium, connecting the writing about the form to the form itself. In Marshall McLuhan's parlance, the medium became the message from a very early point in its development. In addition, that "vulgar use" of physiognomy echoes and exploits the character typing Misener records:

Scientific curiosity about man's physical appearance began to be awakened in the fifth century.... Writers on geography and travel note with much detail the distinctive features of races, and study the relation of physique to geographical environment. (104)

Whitehill notes that some references credit "the painter-medalist" Pisanello [Antonio di Puccio Pisano] (c. 1395-1455 AD) with regenerating the silhouette (49). And even though Leonardo da Vinci showed a strong attraction to physiognomy in the 16th century, most attention is drawn towards the revived interest in the technique in eighteenth century Neoclassicism. Then, the simplified form of portraiture was welcomed as part of a backlash against Baroque and Rococo styles. During the 16th century, the practice of silhouette coincided with etched intaglio. According to Mayor, "This new thing, the accurate black profile likeness, supposedly appeared in England about 1700, when William and Mary are said to have had their silhouettes taken...Here was a novelty in search of a name" (51). Then along came Etienne de Silhouette!

Silhouette Takes Shape

Folklore tells us that the technique of the silhouette was named after that 18th century French translator and political servant to King Louis XV in 1759. Mayor tells us that this naming came about because de Silhouette, a student of economics, was so fiscally conservative that parsimony became his trademark. The sparse appearance of the paper cutouts that were fashionable at the time was considered emblematic of de Silhouette's economic policies: "His name was tacked onto everything skimpy" (51).

Penley Knipe, an anthropologist and Harvard-trained conservationist, began studying the silhouette as an internship project in the paper laboratory at the Yale Center for British Art and the Yale University Art Gallery. "Paper Profiles: American Portrait Silhouettes" was prompted by the author's interest in folk art and her observations regarding the lack of information about the form, and was published in the *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* in 2002. Knipe's comprehensive study includes further work on the silhouette conducted at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, (Boston MFA), the Fogg Art Museum, and the American Antiquarian Society.

The great variety of materials and techniques uncovered through Knipe's extensive technical investigations reinforce understandings and groundings in the study of silhouette. Perhaps most valuable of Knipe's many contributions is her exposure to the lexicon of the genre of the silhouette. Knipe's research provides numerous key terms to illustrate and contextualize the form. Some of these terms include: "shade," "profile," "miniature cutting," "black profile," "scissortype," "skiagram," "shadowgraph," "shadow portrait," "shadow picture," "black shade," "cutout," or simply "likeness." Knipe also tells us that those who cut silhouettes were sometimes called "profilists," "cutters," or "silhouettists" (203). While these terms are often mutually interchangeable, each depicts a unique aspect of the scheme as well.

In addition, Knipe's "Paper Profiles" provides a useful overview of many of the profilists, cutters, or silhouettists—both famous and not—who have been associated with this technique of the primarily graphic arts and crafts in the 17 and early 1800's. Some prominent 18th century "dabblers" in silhouette include Johann Wolfgang von Goethe; Phillip Runge; Jean Huber; John Field; William King; Josiah Wedgwood (whose fired clay vessels, decorated with low reliefs, emulate Dibutade's first wall sculpture); Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres; and Johann Friedrich Anthing (204).

Some practitioners of silhouette considered it merely a trade, while for others it was art. There were many of both groups who, even by charging from a few cents up to a few dollars per cutting, were able to earn a decent living. Whitehill writes, "Even armless artists achieved notoriety by snipping silhouettes with their toes" (9). As an itinerant art, the silhouette is firmly rooted in the tradition of the peripatetic rhetors. This quick, simple, and cost-effective means of folk portraiture gained widespread popularity among families wanting to preserve images of themselves, their loved ones, and even their household furnishings. Up to today, it is widely considered more craft than art, and has never achieved recognition as a medium of fine art in its own right.

As a trade, the techniques and traditions of the silhouette were codified along with its growing popularity. There were four basic types of silhouette created: first, the plain silhouette was drawn or painted onto a surface, or substrate (such as paper, metal, or stone) using watercolor or ink; second, the "cutout" silhouette was produced when a shape or figure was scored from dark material and mounted onto a light surface; next, the sculpted silhouette was shaped or molded from wax, clay, or other materials; lastly, the "hollow-cut" silhouette was cut from paper—usually black or white—allowing the middle, or positive, to drop away. By Knipe's account, the hollow-cut silhouette was the most popular and the "most generic" in appearance (204-5).

Artists signed their silhouettes with what were called “blind stamps,” and there are documented instances of forgeries. Stylistic elements within the portraits also served as signatures of sorts. In addition, many silhouettes came with elaborate titles that described both subject and method, such as this example Knipe provides: “Cut with common scissors by MASTER HUBBARD (aged 13 years) without drawing or machine” (217). Although it was common practice to frame and hang silhouettes in sometimes-elaborate frames, loose silhouettes were also kept in Bibles, other favorite books, or scrapbooks. Some artists cut double silhouettes and kept copies of their works in display albums or portfolios.

Mechanical Reproduction

Other than cutting by sight and by hand, several innovations contributed to the widespread production of the silhouette. “The Physionotrace...was perfected about 1784 by a court cellist to Louis XVI, Gilles Louis Chretien.” A silhouette artist himself, Chretien developed a machine from which multiple copies of a profile could be printed. An artist drew a life-sized profile of a subject using a pointer attached by a system of levers to an engraving tool, “the pantograph, which had been known for over a century” (Mayor 52). The engraver then traced the image onto a copper plate prior to printing.

Other artists tried to improve on the technique. Charles Balthazar Julien Fevret de Saint-Memin (1770-1852) developed a similar tracing process called Physiognotrace. Mayor refers to Saint-Memin as “an exile to New York from the French Revolution, who supported himself and his family for sixteen years by etching nearly a thousand little profile portraits in all the chief towns from New York to Charleston.” Later, after his retirement and return to his homeland of France, de Saint-Memin would refer to his career in America as “an exile’s drudgery” (52-53). John Isaac Hawkins gave the tracing apparatus he patented (which utilized calipers for accuracy) to Charles Wilson Peale.

Referred to by Mayor as “the Leonardo of Philadelphia,” (53) Peale, whose two brothers Raphaele and Rembrandt Peale were also silhouettists, employed his former slave, Moses Williams (later famously known as “The Cutter”) to create traced reproductions of those who sat for him, including fellow and former slaves. Peale was also associated with a device called the “Facietrace” and later started an art institution that survives today, the Peale Museum in Philadelphia, which still houses the physiognotrace Hawkins developed (Knipe 210). Each of these artists/inventors made technological innovations in the craft. However, none of them would achieve the fame (and infamy) of their counterpart, a man who moved the silhouette out of the parlor and into the laboratory—the classmate of Henry Fuseli.

Art Meets “Science”

Mechanization through tracing instruments was only one step on the path of personal detachment for the silhouette. Soon, the introduction of pseudo-science would make human subjects into objects, not only of observation but also of analysis.

The silhouette might have been forgotten, as a polite amusement for ladies, had it not happened to become associated with modern popular science. In 1775 and 1778 Johann Kaspar Lavater, a Zurich evangelical parson in his mid-thirties, published an international best-seller, *Essays on Physiognomy for the Promotion of the Knowledge and Love of Mankind*. (Mayor 51)

Lavater (1741-1801) was born at Zurich and educated there. He took Holy Orders in 1769 and served as parson and deacon in various churches in his hometown until his death. He was an acclaimed orator, and was welcomed during his frequent trips to Germany (his theories have been associated with Nazism). Although his work with the Physiognotrace preceded Chretien’s—he developed a chair to hold subjects still while their faces were being traced—the latter’s machine was deemed more effective. Rather, it was his work in physiognomy that forever sealed Lavater’s reputation, aided in the development of *scientific racism*, and subverted the art of the silhouette thereafter.

Lavater's belief (influenced by Giambattista della Porta, 1535- 1615, and Sir Thomas Browne, 1605-1682) was that character could be determined through physiognomy. Brown, a physician-philosopher, studied not just the face but also expressions as predictors of "inner qualities." He expounded upon these ideas in his *Religio Medici*, and later affirmed these physiognomical beliefs in his *Christian Morals*. Porta's texts, *Of Celestial Physiognomy* and *De humana physiognomia*—which undermined his era's emphasis upon astronomy—were significant in shaping Browne's views. Following their lead, Lavater felt that use of the silhouette, or shade, was the most effective vehicle for studying the countenance, and for making assessments of the character. His considerable research in the field of physiognomics changed the face of the discipline—for better, but in some racial instances, for worse.

In "The Metonymous Face," Richard Brilliant connects Lavater's ideas not only to the Greek emphasis on the face as model, but to a doctrine espoused by Aristotle in his *Prior Analytics*: "It is possible to judge men's character from their physical appearance, if one grants that body and soul change together in all natural affections" (II. xxiii). Written in German and translated into French and English, Lavater's work "included pages of silhouette profiles accompanied by lengthy descriptions of the personality characteristics associated with each type," according to Nancy Forgone (493). His *Essays* would influence both art and literature for centuries to come.

Art Meets Edouart

Undoubtedly, the most famous practitioner of the art of the silhouette in its era of prominence is Auguste [Augustin] Edouart (1789-1861). Edouart was born in France and fought in the French Army until 1813 when he was "forced to leave France under Napoleon" (Mayor 54). Afterwards, he went to England for study and, while there, visited a proper English family. That visit launched the career of a master profilist.

Edouart was little impressed with the family's machine-cut silhouettes and boasted that he could do better by hand—a boast he made good on. What began as a dare of sorts grew into a career that spanned decades on two continents. Edouart was a consummate artist, excelling at one point in making intricate pictures with hair, otherwise known as “mourning art.” It was around 1826 when he switched to his art of shadow portraiture, later becoming known as “the black shade man” (Knipe 203-4). He first traced his subjects by shadow, drawing the figure with graphite on white paper. He cut individual and group portraits—all by hand—and always cut a duplicate.

Edouart was prolific in producing shades, despite his relatively late start. In fact, “By 1839, when Edouart arrived in New York, ‘the craze for silhouettes...was waning,’ partly due to the competition from daguerreotypy” (“Unsigned” 109). Early attempts at the artistic technique of photogravure, and later photography, better satisfied the public demand for realistic portraiture. Nevertheless, Edouart enjoyed considerable success, “cutting nearly 4,000 silhouettes during his decade in America” (109). Some estimates have him making as many as 10,000 cuts throughout his career, many of which he documented in his *Treatise on Silhouette Likenesses*, 1835. His *Silhouettes of Eminent Americans, 1839-1844*—“a veritable portrait gallery of distinguished Americans”—includes cuttings of four US Presidents, six governors, and eighteen mayors, along with newspaper clippings of death notices that recounted their biographies (ix). Many of the silhouettes in the volume are signed by both Edouart and the human subjects portrayed.



Figure 11: Auguste Edouart Group Cutting (Unidentified)

The Doctor is In

Despite the level of success achieved by many silhouettists, even Edouart, no other single individual had the far-reaching impact on the development of the silhouette as Lavater. His beliefs would be taken up, for example, by Charles Darwin (1809-1882), and inform that author's *The Expression of Emotions*, 1872 [Figure 12]. His ideas would also be reflected in Cesare Lombroso's studies of criminology, and later eugenics. Lombroso (1836-1909) photographed criminals and developed a set of "typical" characteristics. From these, he derived a "facial and cranial semiotic" that is still used on "Wanted" posters and in "identikits" for police sketch artists today (Brilliant 33).

Such practices as Lombroso's fall under the auspices of physiognomy, which studies significant zones of the face and its expressions. Those practices also extend from phrenology, which studies the bumps and depressions on the skull and draws character inferences from the like. The German physicians Franz Joseph Gall and Johann Spurzheim are credited with developing phrenology around 1800. Its use was particularly popular in 19th century Europe, in its racial profiling of the Eastern Jews.



Figure 12: Illustration from Darwin's *Expression of Emotions*

Even outside the realm of these pseudo-sciences, Lavater's influences can be felt. Writing in "The Shadow Only," Nancy Forgione refers to myth, legend, and folklore, and some connections between the spirit and the flesh. Such representations, she asserts, have to do with the "shadow nature.... the less apparent underside, inside, or dark side of people and things" (493). According to Mayor, these characteristics would be looked at very closely in a branch of science other than physiognomy or phrenology:

Psychological investigation now looked easy with Lavater in hand to classify a curving forehead as effeminate, a projecting underlip as phlegmatic, and so forth. Though this forerunner of the Rorschach tests may seem like quackery, the interest in psychology which it aroused helped to prepare the way for [Sigmund] Freud's great anatomy of character. (51)

Forgione's associations of the "expressive powers" (491) of the silhouette with psychology and spirituality also point to Freud's theories. His *Interpretation of Dreams* and a 2006 exhibit publication based on his studies, *From Neurology to Psychoanalysis*, are useful in understanding how the form of the silhouette developed in the realm of the anatomy of character. When Forgione describes the silhouette's "distortion potential," she pinpoints aspects of the form that served as harbingers of racism and Nazism (496).

Freud's treatment of physiognomy is broad, diverse, and the subject of much controversy. Leslie Cundliffe, writing in one of the many studies in which Freud is featured, assesses his approach in this way:

Freud's psychoanalytic speculations were based around Leonardo's illegitimate birth, which, in effect, resulted in him having the equivalent of two mothers; this might be the reason for the presence and relationship of two mothers in the painting.... Although interesting, Freud's physiognomic interpretation is overly reliant on imponderable evidence that links Leonardo's upbringing to the content of the painting, which is somewhat at odds with judgments arrived at by weighing the wider, dispersed evidence based on the logic of the situation in which the work was made. Freud falls for what Gombrich describes as the "physiognomic fallacy" that we can infer all the meanings in a work of art from its less ponderable forms. (72)

Walter Pater's physiognomic syllogism: "If this...then..." is a precursor and counterpart to the physiognomic interpretations of Freud.

Further, Cundliffe is not the only critic who questions Freud's logic in relation to the assessment of character based upon physical appearance. Marilyn Migiel applies similar consideration to Freud's approach to physiognomy in his work on dreams:

In attempting to discover the meaning of the composite figure of Irma, Freud oscillates between two kinds of associations. On one hand, he is attentive to physiognomy.... which leads him, by both positive or negative association, to a particular triad of women.... When Freud focuses on "positioning" rather than "physiognomy," a different configuration of three women emerges.... For the dreamer, emphasizing position and taking one's distance from physiognomy seem to mean reading symbolically, taking one's distance from relations constructed within the realm of the imaginary. Here, obviously, the interpreter can draw upon a tradition of reading for the Spirit rather than for the Letter. ...Things are not so simple. (29-30)

Things are not so simple indeed. There is much more work to be done to understand and situate Freud in relation to the silhouette. What is certain is that the form's adaptations post-Lavater both borrow from and inject elements of psychosocio-analysis.

The Ironic Profile

Not fortuitously, Forgione does a good job of connecting Lavater with French visual artists. She notes, for instance, that, "Artists such as Edgar Degas [1834-1917] and Vincent van Gogh [1853-1890] referred to Lavater's ideas" (493). Other examples include Impressionist and Post-Impressionist artists like Georges-Pierre Seurat (1859-1891), and Paul Gauguin (1848-1903). Some relevant characteristics of French Impressionist painting to which Forgione refers include emphasis on light and its effects (such as shadow), inclusion of movement, and distinct visual angles.

Another influential 19th century French artist associated with the shadow, or shade, was the painter, printmaker, and sculptor, Honore' Daumier (1808-79). In 1832, Daumier was imprisoned for *Gargantua*, likely his best-known work, a visual satire of King Louis Phillipe which was published in the comic journal, *La Caricature*. Daumier's critique of the French bourgeoisie led to a 6-month imprisonment because the King did not appreciate, or find much humor in, Daumier's aestheticization of his politics.

For Forgione, 19th-century French painters externalize the “intrinsic essence” of things by using silhouette and shadow to artistic and literary effect. She writes, “Credited with the ability to externalize the intrinsic essence of things, shadow and silhouette constituted a crucial pictorial strategy for making visible the artist’s apprehension of the interior” (493). The silhouette’s uses in late nineteenth-century France, particularly as evidenced by the caricaturist Daumier, both belie and underscore Lavater’s creed that “No art can attain the truth of the shade [silhouette], taken with precision” (qtd. in Levitine 331).

Moreover, Forgione’s attention to the “essence”-capturing aspects of silhouette recalls the original Greek figures of comparison and description which the form denotes. The *iconism*—formation of a figure, representation, or semblance, a delineation or description—and the *characterismos*—which applies when the figure is restricted to descriptions of the body—have come full circle from ancient rhetoric into contemporary usage. A fairly common example of the *characterismos effictio* is the use of caricature as a form of visual or literary portraiture.

Caricature is at times flattery and at others critique. Thomas Browne is credited with coining the term, drawing on his studies of physical and anatomical character representations. Brilliant expounds on metonymy and the silhouette when he describes caricature as “a highly concentrated, symbolic portrayal” (28). In connecting silhouette with the riffing, as in the jazz tradition, which occurs in caricature, Brilliant writes:

Caricature is graphical coding of facial features that seeks, paradoxically, to be more like a face than the face itself. It is a transformation which amplifies perceptually significant information while reducing less significant details. The resulting distortion satisfies the beholder’s mental mode of what is unique about a particular face. (27)

Making the likeness “more like the face than the face” is hyperreal, in the way of Jean Baudrillard, whose simulacrum becomes “more real than the real.”

As early as 1901, this derivation of the silhouette was being fleshed out by, for example, parodist Max Beerbohm, who suggests in *The Spirit of Caricature* that judgment has no place in caricature. But Brilliant disagrees, asserting, “Caricature without commentary seems impossible” (30). And there potentially lies the rub—that commentary necessarily infuses subjectivity into this “realistic” enterprise. Thus, Anne McCauley, writing in *The Art Bulletin Review*, avers of caricature, “The 19th century, like the centuries before it, continued to struggle with the complexity and apparent whimsicality of human behavior, which frustrated efforts at classification” (342).

Literary License and the Silhouette

While he states that Lavater’s work is “both reductive and tendentious,” Brilliant recognizes that the effects of Lavater’s work “extended far beyond the visual arts to the composition of verbal portraits in 19th century fiction, especially in France and England” (34). Likewise, Whitehill draws a literary analogy when she states, “The artist working in this genre [of the silhouette] is, like the short-story writer, reduced to essentials and obligated to make each line count” (6). Forgione makes a similar observation, noting that in order “to appreciate its full import we must understand the silhouette’s significance within the late nineteenth-century discourse.... It functioned as an abstract concept as well as a concrete device; that is, it operated both literally and metaphorically” (491).

Her observations reinforce the *manirhetorical* qualities of the silhouette—its manifold capabilities to operate in literary, visual, as well as more traditional oral/aural rhetorical scopes—and in various media. Techniques of the literary silhouette, the *iconismos* and *characterismos*, operate upon a similar set of concerns, and with similar rhetorical tools, as the visual representations of portraiture and caricature. Both also share the same opportunities for physiognomic appropriation and re/misinterpretation. These overlapping schemas offer much to an understanding of silhouette’s *manirhetorics*.

Misener brings the examination of silhouette full circle. When she writes, “All satiric portraiture, whether in prose or poetry is made more trenchant by the *iconistic* form. It is a double-edged weapon that attains its effect by accumulation as well as by brevity,” (114) she is describing the adaptive qualities of the modern silhouette. It is a form which, whether in its visual or literary manifestations, and despite its sparse and seemingly clear-cut design, encapsulates significant accrued meaning. By way of explanation as to how specifically the form works, she adds, “Epigrammatic terseness...was attained...by the asyndeton and antithesis. It is the exaggeration of a tendency...an interminable series of artificially balanced phrases” (117-18).

Further, Misener contributes to an understanding of the silhouette in its role as a literary trope. She recognizes that even in its literary bent, the *iconismos* plays at least a dual role. She explains,

In biography, as in other literary forms, the *iconismos* may serve two widely different purposes: that of vigorous incisive, usually satiric, portraiture or the dry transcription of features. In the first, the writer, aiming at emotional effect, seizes upon features indicative of the personality or strikingly peculiar, and draws with a few bold strokes a vivid picture, almost a caricature. The intention in the second, as in legal identification, is to give information. Commonplace features, color of the eyes, hair, complexion, height are inventoried in a detached photographic manner for the information of the curious. It is uncolored by emotion, devoid of style, wholly didactic. Both types are found in Latin historiography and biography. (115-16)

Evans concurs with this view of the prevalence of the trope, stating, “Iconistic portraiture belongs to all classical literature” (“Physiognomics” 279).

The literary *iconismos* gains its power by utilizing the “scientific” features of physiognomy and phrenology, as well as by verbal caricature. It does this by incorporating satiric turns of phrase, juxtaposing wit with realism, and establishing a tone best described as tongue-in-cheek. This parodic style of writing is notable in the fictional works of 19th century writers such as Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, Charlotte Bronte, Edgar Allan Poe, and most notably in this study—Flannery O’Connor.

As well, other 19th-century writers can be associated with the *iconism*. These include the traveling linguist George Borrow, whose character studies of the Romani people of Europe took on an ethnographic cast, and Honore' de Balzac. Of him, McCauley writes, "Balzac uses the bird's eye view as a mode of entry into his narrative, a transition from the universal to the particular.... Those qualities...make Balzac a 'realist' and a master of physiognomic description." He is also one who "was familiar with Moreau de la Sarthe's edition of Lavater's writings and often refereed to his ideas" (342). A vivid example of the literary *iconismos* is Oscar Wilde's *Portrait of Dorian Gray*.

Politics of the Silhouette:

Two Sides of the Same (or a Similar) Coin

Ultimately, the rhetorics of race converge in the schemata of the silhouette, in its verbal as well as visual manifestations. This *manirhetorical* trope operates through various guises and genres. These include the profile portraiture of the ancient Egyptians; the wall tracing of the Corinthian maid; photographic descriptions of the Greeks; the physiognomical *iconismos* of the Roman slaves; the paper cutouts and caricatures of the 19th century; and the *characterismos* of modern literature. Taxonomies, characterizations, stereotyping, and other potential venues for racial profiling wend their way through the genres, cultures, and societies in which they are promulgated, and continue to color race relations today.

The coin is a fitting metaphor for the two sides of the black/white racial issue, given its role in ancient Greece and Whitehill's references to ancient coins as media for the profile portraits of prominent citizens. Further, Misener's reference to the *iconismos* as a "double-edged weapon" (114) accurately portrays the duplicitous nature of racial animus. Another metaphor that illustrates this dialectic is the double-edged sword, cutting both ways, as racial tensions are experienced by and towards both races.

This *manirhetorical* paradigm is applicable to the works of two 20th century artists who, on the face of things, appear to have little in common other than gender. One a white American, the other black, the two silhouettists lived in different eras—one at the dawn of the 1960's Civil Rights Movement —the other, in its afterglow. One is a primarily literary artist, the other primarily visual. One embraces and virtually embodies the political enterprise, while the other makes a conscious effort to shun it.

But there is more that connects these two artists than meets the eye. Geography, for example, was one common element between the two. Although Mary Flannery O'Connor died in 1964—during—but before the Civil Rights Movement took firm root, her literature was informed by the Southern milieu of Savannah and Milledgeville, Georgia, where she lived and died. Kara Elizabeth Walker—born five years after O'Connor's death—moved from Stockton, California to Stone Mountain, Georgia (the home of the modern KKK) during her formative teenage years. Though she now lives in the North, she, too, was deeply influenced by the racial culture of the Deep South.

Another unifying characteristic of these two women was their steadfast commitment to growing and developing in their respective arts. Both pursued arts education on the undergraduate as well as graduate levels. Training in their crafts reveals their mutual appreciation for fellowship in an arts community. In addition, both O'Connor and Walker viewed art as their livelihood, supporting themselves through the sale of their works, and earning monetary awards in recognition of their achievements.

In addition, O'Connor and Walker's works are both, regardless of intention, rich in racial rhetorics. Considering herself apart from racial politics, but being so closely attuned to her Southern environment, O'Connor reflected and responded to the prevalent racial views of her community. Walker had an equally strong reaction to the social mores of her Georgia environs and demonstrates strong racial attitudes in her art.

Perhaps finally, the works of both artists display elements of the silhouette in the aspect of racial profiling. Walker's adaptation of the silhouette is literal in her production of graphic black paper cutouts, and her use of text only underscores her racial intentions. At the same time, O'Connor's uses of the literary silhouette—and her forays into visual arts by way of cartoon drawings and linoleum cuts—through caricature, stereotyping, and anthropomorphism—are just as rooted in the ancient rhetorical traditions of the *iconismos* and *characterismos*. Both artists have much to teach us about the languages and linguistics of race—how to read, interpret, and speak them.

The transdisciplinarity of the silhouette renders it as both the object of study and an integral means of investigation. Highlighting the *manirhetorical* qualities of the silhouette is central to an appreciation of the works of O'Connor and Walker. As such, the language of the silhouette dispersed throughout this study encompasses the visual vernacular of the profile, shade, shadow, skiagraph, cut-paper cutout, and cameo. It also entails the literary nomenclature of the shadow, *iconism*, *characterismos*, caricature, vignette, word picture, verbal and fictitious portraiture, and stereotype. These terms may be used interchangeably and will appear variously in this study. At all points, it is the trope of the silhouette which is referenced towards a deeper understanding of the rhetoric of black/white racial representations and/or racial profiling.

CHAPTER THREE

FLANNERY O'CONNOR AND THE VIRTUAL NEGRO

Across the nation, the spring and summer of 1903 marked a venomous turn in race relations between blacks and whites. A pall was descending on black America, like nothing experienced since the darkest hours of antebellum slavery. If anything, the poisoned atmosphere and accelerating disintegration of the structure of civil society more resembled to blacks a time two centuries earlier, when white slave traders and their corrupted indigenous allies descended without explanation upon the villages of West Africa to plunder the native population. For at least the next four decades, especially on the back-country roads and rural rail lines of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, and Florida, no black person living outside the explicit protection of whites could again feel entirely secure.

The plummeting position of black Americans was driven by the convergence of transforming currents in American life. In the years of abolitionist fervor before and after the Civil War, northern whites who pushed for full citizenship for black freedmen operated under naïve assumptions.... No society in human history had attempted to instantly transform a vast and entrenched slave class into immediate and full citizenship.... And even among the most ardent abolitionists, few white Americans in any region were truly prepared to accept black men and women, with their seemingly inexplicable dialects, mannerisms, and supposedly narrow skills, as true and social equals.

Douglass A. Blackmon
Slavery by Another Name

It is no accident of fate that Lavater's strongest period of popularity dovetailed with the seismic shift in social and race relations of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Abolition and the accordant adjustment in master/slave interactions precipitated rapid cultural and political transformations. In light of those post-slavery changes, Richard Brilliant posits Lavater's themes of anatomical typecasting as fitting right into an era in which "familiar social conventions were breaking down" as newly freed Blacks and former slaveowners confronted a changed reality. Lavater's theories on face- and form-reading lent security at a time when there was a perceived need for a system of social shorthand as widespread migration and the changing marketplace prompted closer and more bilateral contact between the races. Wariness was rife as "increasingly one encountered strangers whose backgrounds and motives were unknown" (Brilliant 34).

In many ways, the 19th century was marked by global progress. It was a time of industrialization, of vast invention in science and medicine. In the US and Europe, technological innovations in transportation and rail conveyance improved quality of life and resulted in urbanization and significant population growth. Discovery of landmasses and settlements on the continents of Africa and Asia increased travel and migration. An ethos of liberalism took hold in Europe and on other continents. But closer to home, as Douglas Blackmon states, “Darwin’s still new theory of evolution was threading through American culture with unintended sinister repercussions” (235). The cure for unfamiliarity, as Brilliant infers, was becoming as noxious as the disease. The resultant strain in social interactions perpetuated suspicion and mistrust in both races.

However, the co-optation of Lavater’s groundbreaking work, by way of Darwin’s species taxonomies, most served the aims of white supremacy. By tying so closely the physical and the moral, systematic stereotyping led to institutionalized racism. This manifestation of prejudice can be referred to as “‘Hellenophile’ racism,” as described by Simona Forti in “The Biopolitics of Souls.” She writes,

Race is in fact not assumed, naively or instrumentally, to be a biological and factual datum, but rather a Platonic idea that gives shape and brings order to the chaotic world of appearances. Race thus becomes a phenomenon perceived by our senses as an expression of the soul that, according to the words of *Phaedo*, is related to “the divine, immortal, rational, uniform, indissoluble and always identical to itself.” (18)

Forti’s views on biopolitics allude to the *scala natura*, the Great Chain of Being, and the literary canons of John Milton and Cotton Mather—and later Hawthorne and Stowe.

Like other aspects of physiognomy, biopolitics spans a broad swath of humanity:

Race, which expresses itself in somatic features, is therefore an indicator of the animal nature of man. In other words, it enables classification of the different degrees of humanity along a spectrum that includes animals and human beings. This is accompanied by the erosion of the “classical” representation of the enemy as a barbarian or savage beast, and it marks the emergence of a new kind of rhetoric, based on the scientific discourses of medicine, biology, demography, criminology, and psychopathology. (13)



Figure 13: Drawing of Great Chain of Being from Didacus Valades, *Rhetorica Christiana*, 1579

Northern abolitionists based their opposition to slavery on the common humanity of Christians, both black and white. Yet not even Christianity could save the South. “Dehumanizing interpretations of the racial order were unleashed” following Darwin’s publication, and a “new conceit of multiple, distinct human species emerged” (Blackmon 235-6). The Indian Wars following the Civil War further perpetuated racial difference and spurred conviction of white superiority. Hundreds of novels and short stories were written to extol white progress and “eminent domain” (236). Writers like Joel Chandler Harris (of the B’rer Rabbit tales) and Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of one of the age’s most emblematic publications, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, presaged Thomas Dixon’s *The Leopard’s Spots*, 1902, a fictionalized apologetic of Southern slavery and slaveholders.

With the dawning of the 20th century, social challenges were occurring in Europe as well. As one of the more notable examples of this, Virginia Woolf observed after viewing Roger Fry's exhibit, *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*, that "In or about December, 1910, human character changed." The exhibit Fry organized included works by Gauguin, Cezanne, Matisse, Picasso, and van Gogh in addition to Manet. The exhibit poster, featuring a Gauguin Tahitian nude, and the exhibit's focus on non-Western subjects disrupted the status quo. They "shattered the English art world's assumptions about aesthetic civility" and called into question its racial mores (Seshagiri 61).

Having already adopted an oppositional view of racial and social imperialism, Woolf was further stimulated by the exhibit. She determined to make a statement on the occasion of the Post-Impressionistic Ball in March 1911. Attending the ball with her sister Vanessa Bell, the two dressed "as savages 'a la Gauguin'" (Bishop, qtd. in Seshagiri 64) to demonstrate their fellow feeling with the subjects in some of the art. They browned their arms and legs, wore them bare, and draped the rest of their bodies in colorful printed cloth that they believed to be in honor of Negroes. Their act of rejection of British modesty—in blackface—was part of the Bloomsbury movement's "reordering the boundaries of Englishness through tropes of racial difference" (Seshagiri 65).

Later Fry exhibits and lectures, along with other cross-cultural events in London between 1911 and 1918, had significant impacts on the Bloomsbury Group and caused ripple effects in the international arts of the period. Exposure to Asian, African, and Native American cultures particularly influenced Woolf's writing. Seshagiri writes, "In 1920, after the Omega Workshops closed, Woolf attended a show of African carvings that Fry had organized at the Chelsea Book Club. The "'obscene' sculptures at the 'Niggers' show'...as Woolf called it, suggested to her that 'something in their style might be written'" (66). Woolf's racial inflection was most reflected in *To the Lighthouse*, 1927.

Yet even in her commitment to racial diversity and artistic experimentation, there is much irony in Woolf's seeming perpetuation of racial stereotyping and Empire:

Geographical spaces outside of Britain are represented as diversely as the characters inhabiting or moving through them: the South America of *The Voyage Out* (1917) and the India of *The Waves* evoke timeless, eternal nether-worlds...*Orlando's* seventeenth-century Constantinople and *Mrs. Dalloway's* colonial India in the 1920's...these novels burst with the artifacts of colonialism (jewels from India, books on African game hunting, poisoned assegais) as well as the art objects of non-Western cultures (Egyptian pitchers, Turkish hookahs, and Chinese silks). (Seshagiri 62)

These conflicting cultural elements contribute to what Seshagiri calls "an ideological and aesthetic complexity" (62) in Woolf's *Weltanschauung*, a concept which, Forti points out, does not mean "theory," but rather "image-intuition-idea" (14).

This practice of cultural amalgamation speaks to the resounding difficulties of espousing, representing, and assimilating race in the context of social multiplicity and artistic expression. And "because her anti-imperialism does not manifest itself through claims about racial or cultural equality, Woolf's novels often reproduce a wide range of assumptions about nonwhite otherness as well as inscribe tropes of racial difference onto white English identity" (Seshagiri 61). In effect, her writing adheres to the literary form of the *iconismos*, or "fictitious portraiture" that was recurrent in the era. The *iconistic* method of silhouette was common with Woolf and her contemporaries.

Flannery O'Connor was born into that era in which—according to Woolf—human character was changing. O'Connor's writing, like Woolf's, reflects the complex and ambivalent racial worldview so common at the turn of the 20th century. Yet, unlike Woolf, O'Connor grew into and was immersed by Southern culture, an environment deeply etched with the vestiges of slavery. Still, when asked in a 1963 interview with Gerard Sherry what effects integration was having on the South, O'Connor responded, "I don't think it is doing anything to it.... No basic attitudes are being changed. Industrialization is what changes the South, not integration" (qtd. in Magee 102).

A Developing Aesthetic

An only-child, Mary Flannery O'Connor was born in Savannah on March 25, 1925. Her "parental units," Regina Cline and Edward O'Connor represented two of that city's oldest Catholic families. Accordingly, O'Connor attended parochial elementary school near her family's Savannah square. In 1938, moving to the Cline family homestead of Andalusia in Milledgeville, O'Connor attended the Peabody Laboratory School, which was affiliated with the Georgia State College for Women, now the Georgia College and State University. Edward O'Connor had died from complications with lupus when Flannery was a teenager, and she and Regina stayed on in Milledgeville.

While O'Connor's first published works were the cartoons she drew for the *Peabody Palladium*, she grew into her own as an artist while attending the Georgia State College for Women. There she published drawn and linoleum-cut cartoons, fiction, essays, and poems in the campus literary journal, the *Corinthian*. She also contributed to the college newspaper, the *Colonnade*, and the college yearbook, the *Spectrum*, where she served as Art Editor. She submitted some drawings to the *New Yorker* that were rejected.



Figure 14: "I don't enjoy looking at these old pictures either, but it doesn't hurt my reputation for people to think I'm a lover of fine arts." O'Connor cartoon, Courtesy of GSCW

O'Connor's experiences with the visual arts were actual precursors of her writing style. Through her art, she honed her interests in observing cultural nuance and social taxonomy, offering visual descriptions of students in categories synonymous with the jocks and geeks of today. In several of the cartoons, O'Connor even parodies herself, such as in the one which portrays a social situation in which everyone is dancing except for a "bespectacled wall flower who grins behind her hand and asserts that she can always pursue a Ph.D" (<http://www.austinkleon.com/2007/05/07/flannery-oconnor-cartoonist/>). She liked making visual art, O'Connor later said, because it helped shape her ethos as a writer and provided an immediate pay-off that the rigors of her writing did not. In her *Collected Works*, she writes, "I did caricatures when I was in college too, not of individuals but of the types found around the place and I enjoyed that greatly, there is something immediate about it, it is either successful or it isn't, there are never any doubts, such as you feel over a piece of fiction that you can't see all at once" (1112).

In addition to typecasting subjects in her art, O'Connor melds visual and verbal silhouette in her fiction. According to Kelly Gerald, O'Connor's use of humor to highlight and satirize human interaction is emblematic of the work that earned her fame. One of the most striking aspects of her cartoons is the juxtaposition of images and text:

...the disruption of the expectation established by the image by the understatement of the caption makes the situation comical [Figure 15]. But this is more than a simple or generic disturbance. It is a disruption of a particular kind: a near complete reversal, an inversion, the creation of a negative image. O'Connor shows her viewers the starkly unusual in the ordinariness of an everyday occurrence. (30)

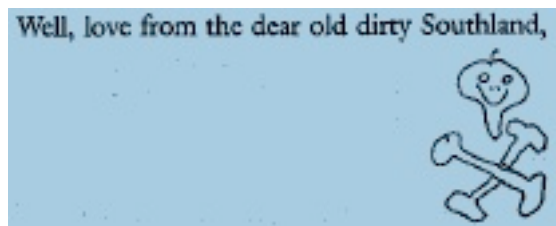


Figure 15: O'Connor Illustration from the Closing to a Letter, *Collected Works*, 1063

O'Connor maintained a vital commitment to the production of her visual arts right up to, and beyond, the point of launching her literary career in earnest. And, "As a matter of fact, her friends once expected her to be a painter rather than a writer" (Magee 82). She took two advanced drawing classes even while enrolled in the University of Iowa's program in Creative Writing, starting in 1945. And after determining to devote the bulk of her creative efforts to her writing, she continued to extol the virtues of a strong visual aesthetic: She writes, for example, "Any discipline can help your writing: logic, mathematics, theology, and of course and particularly drawing. Anything that helps you to see, anything that makes you look" (84). She also wrote,

For the writer of fiction, everything has its testing point in the eye...Judgment is something that begins in the act of vision, and when it does not, or when it becomes separated from vision, then a confusion exists in the mind which transfers itself to the story. (*Mystery* 91).

In addition to admiring and being influenced by various fiction writers, she also emulated some visual artists. Among those was Henri Matisse, whose chapel in Vence she hoped to visit during her trip to France in 1958. Another was the French painter, Honore' Daumier, of whose political caricatures she wrote, "They kill me" (*Habit* 494).



Figure 16: O'Connor with Self-Portrait, www.bedfordstmartins.com/.../oconnor.htm

Whistling Dixie: The Whitewashed South

Standing at the convergence of time and place, O'Connor was inadvertently influenced by the politics of the aftermath of slavery. Unlike Woolf, O'Connor does not indicate a proactive stance towards rectifying, or even questioning, the status quo. Instead, she appears to subscribe to—indeed, to inscribe—what Toni Morrison calls *moeurs* of the South, mannerisms which figure so prominently in O'Connor's corpus of fiction and non-fiction. Morrison, a literary contemporary to O'Connor, speaks to perhaps this greatest legacy of slavery—the myth of “whiteness”—in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. While authors and educators like Peggy McIntosh have associated the phenomenon of whiteness with white privilege and entitlement in housing, employment, and education, Morrison takes a more pointed tack. For her, it represents a rhetorical reservoir for race in American literature.

In Morrison's view, the rhetoric of whiteness lacks sufficient *logos* in that it seeks to avoid the very thing upon which its own entity depends. In other words, Morrison views whiteness in literature as a discourse of evasion, a passive-aggressive posturing which thus invites serious investigation. According to Morrison, “We need studies of the technical ways in which an Africanist character is used to limn out and enforce the invention and implications of whiteness” (52). She variously describes whiteness as an ideology in which “the habit of ignoring race is understood to be a grateful, even generous, liberal gesture” (10); “a willful critical blindness” (18); and linguistic praxes that demonstrate “the parasitical nature of white freedom” (57). It is a literature that is predicated upon what Morrison calls *American Africanism*, an “invented Africa,” (7) “a fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm, and desire that is uniquely American” (38). No author illuminates this literary myth, or silhouette, and contrasts it as sharply against the dark background of former slaves in the South, so finely as O'Connor.

Whiteness often reveals by concealing. Past is prologue with O'Connor and despite her protests to the contrary, race casts a tall shadow in her work. Its presence is sometimes murky, but always ubiquitous—a shadowgraph of Southern society. Thus, her efforts to disengage from the cultural artifacts of race are perhaps disingenuous, as when she writes in a letter to Thomas Stritch, "I am sick to death of all these interviews. All they want to know about is the race business and that's the last thing I feel like talking about" (*Collected* 1189). But Morrison begs to differ with O'Connor's reticence, a quality that is consistent with the ethos of whiteness, asserting, "Even, and especially, when American texts are not 'about' Africanist presences or characters or narrative or idiom, the shadow hovers in implication, in sign, in line of demarcation" (47).

True: race is not the 'be-all and the end-all' in the American South. The region has a strong history of political and military activism separate and apart from race. But its history is heavy-laden with a narrative that can never be completely severed from its genesis in slavery. The views of some critics may overstate that import, asserting like Olu Oguibe that, "It is a great tragedy that all things in this society, including history, pedagogy, and the pursuit of knowledge, must struggle under the asphyxiating sludge of race, which is the legacy of the myth of whiteness" (qtd. in Bowles 45). Yet, emotions do run high when it comes to this international issue, and those sentiments are duly amplified in the South. Race is a two-edged sword since O'Connor rightfully asserts, "The fiction writer is interested in individuals, not races; he knows that good and evil are not apportioned along racial lines and when he deals with topical matters, if he is any good, he sees the long run through the short run" (qtd. in Magee 109). But Morrison counters, insisting, "Writers transform aspects of their social grounding into aspects of language...they tell stories, fight secret wars, limn out all sorts of debates blanketed in their texts.... Writers always know at some level that they do this" (4).

So was O'Connor aware of the secret wars and debates she was limning? She was surely not oblivious or silent about the racial tensions within her community. She maintained, for example, a running dialogue on race in correspondences with friends—most notably Maryat Lee, whose brother served as president of O'Connor's college alma mater, the then Georgia College for Women in Milledgeville. In her letters to Lee, O'Connor reports on hate group activity in town: "Did I tell you that the Ku Klux Klan met across the road Saturday before last? They burned a cross—just for the sake of ceremony" (*Habit* 489). On the local Civil Rights movement: "The South is the place for you if you can keep yourself from running off to every sit-in or wade-in or kneel-in that is being held" (482). On the stalling of integration: "...the latest thing is the American Resettlement Association, whose object is to re-settle Georgia colored families in refined Northern residential areas.... This is not quite as permanent as sending them all back to Africa but it has a lot of supporters" (*Collected* 1046). And on her misgivings about black writers: "About the Negroes, the kind I don't like is the philosophizing prophesying pontificating kind, the James Baldwin kind. Very ignorant but never silent" (*Habit* 580).

In addition to observing the racial climate around her, in other letters O'Connor draws on her own experiences with race. She jokes often, for instance, about Shot and Louise, two of the workers on her family farm, Andalusia. In many of these exchanges, she co-signs her mother Regina's feelings, such as when she writes, "[Regina] says these niggers are smart as tacks when it comes to looking out for no. 1" (*Habit* 65). Or, "My mother says every nigger she knows has a better-looking car than she does" (65). She even credits Regina with providing the impetus and title for one of her favorite stories:

My mother went cow-buying a couple of years ago and asked an old man for directions how to get to a certain man's house. He told her to go thus and so and that she couldn't miss it because it was the only house in town with an artificial nigger. I was so intrigued with that that I made up my mind to use it. It's not only a wonderful phrase but it's a terrible symbol of what the South has done to itself. I think it's one of the best stories I've written.... (140)

So there is indeed a significant level of personal recognition and engagement by O'Connor on the subject of race. She may have grown tired of the attention given to it during the height of the Civil Rights movement, but she was surely not indifferent in her opinions. Sally Fitzgerald, O'Connor's first biographer/hagiographer and close friend, refutes any intimation that O'Connor reflected bigoted views, insisting "her will was never in danger on the score of racism." At the same time, Fitzgerald does recognize an emotional detachment between the author and her black subjects. In the "Introduction" to her collection of O'Connor's letters, *The Habit of Being*, Fitzgerald writes,

I have found myself thinking that her own being would have been likewise raised and perfected, completed, by a greater personal empathy with the blacks who were so important a part of the tissue of the South, and of the humanity with whose redemption she was so truly and deeply concerned. But large social issues as such were not the subject of her writing, and she never thought in those terms. (xviii)

In many ways it was precisely O'Connor's thinking "in those terms" that earned and solidified her reputation as a celebrated writer. Why then did she diminish the impact of race on her writing? The answer has to do with Southern "mystery and manners."

Southern *moeurs* are strange beasts. These elements of Southern grace, charm, and hospitality that O'Connor prizes so highly and depicts so well are illustrative of the region, providing a saccharine aftertaste for the bitter pill of social segregation. As with whiteness, there is a shell game at play—what you see is no guarantee of what you will get. A Southern smile, for instance, can just as easily be a smirk—a signal of contempt rather than of friendship, of distaste as much as pleasure. A Southern smile often masks scorn or bemusement, so that traditional symbols are difficult to decipher and easily misread. It can be "particularly gracious" and at the same time "a contagion," which prompts O'Connor to write that there is "no weapon" like a Southern smile (*Collected* 497). Southern-speak uses metaphor and metonymy to soften heavy emotional blows, like saying, "Honey" and "Bless your heart" in condescension, not Christian kindness.

A Shroud of Good Breeding

Mystery and manners are the two ideological poles of O'Connor's work. Much has been made and written about the importance of Catholicism and Christian symbols in her fiction. She herself has spoken and written in various venues about how her spiritual beliefs influence and are reflected in her stories. What will be emphasized here is the intersection of faith and race as twin dynamics that help O'Connor form her verbal silhouettes. These two affinities tie O'Connor to the South in a way that is primal, visceral, and original to the region. When asked by interviewer Sherry how Southern manners would bear on the racial turmoil of the segregated South, O'Connor answers, "Manners are the next best thing to Christian charity. I don't know how much pure unadulterated Christian charity can be mustered in the South but I have confidence that the manners of both races will show through in the long run" (qtd. in Magee 102). It will take God and proper etiquette to redeem Southern race relations, O'Connor believes.

Art too plays a role, and there is no aspect of art that goes uninspected by O'Connor. When she writes about art, her remarks apply equally to her message as to her medium, as when she asserts, "Art requires a delicate adjustment of the outer and inner worlds in such a way that without changing their nature, they can be seen through each other" (*Mystery* 34-5). O'Connor's main creative venue is her fiction, "an art that calls for the strictest attention to the real"; but even reality can stand some improvement (96). Like her views on racial reconciliation in the South, O'Connor observes, "There are two qualities that make fiction. One is the sense of mystery and the other is the sense of manners" (103). And as with her Christian faith, O'Connor melds her experiences of being both humbled and ennobled by her work. She confesses, "When I write, I am a maker.... The imagination works on what the eye sees, but it molds and directs this to the end of whatever it is making" (*Conversations* 39, 42). She makes Southern vignettes.

Making word pictures provides O'Connor a medium for manifesting her vision of a homeland she jokingly refers to as "the dear old dirty Southland" (*Collected* 1063). Although she uses her work to poke fun at the South, she also shows the love she feels and her indebtedness to it for her upbringing—for being such a rich wellspring for her writing. On July 16, 1957, she wrote to fellow author Cecil Dawkins, "If you're a writer and the South is what you know, then it's what you'll write about.... The best of my writing has been done here" (1037). Later, during an interview with Betsy Lochridge in 1959, she noted, "Southern writers are stuck with the South, and it's a very good thing to be stuck with" (*Conversations* 37). "The Southerner," she went on to say, "possesses a story-telling tradition. When a Southerner wants to make a point, he tells a story" (49). By O'Connor's account, "The best American fiction has always been regional," (*Mystery* 58) and she insists that no one tells a story better than the Southern-bred.

The South's ambivalent relations with its inhabitants—accounting in large part for the inimitability of Southern stories—are the subject of O'Connor's text, *Mystery and Manners*. At the same time, because the universal is based in the particular, Southern uniqueness contributes to its widespread appeal. Narrative, O'Connor explains, is a vital part of a Southerner's life because "it's actually his way of reasoning and dealing with experience" (qtd. in Magee 49). A strong literary tradition, she asserts, "has passed to and stayed longest where there has been a shared past, a sense of likeness, and the possibility of reading a small history in a universal light" (*Mystery* 58). But her view of homogeneity in the meta-codes—of a "shared past" and "sense of likeness"—even her perception of a "small history"—belies the complexity of Southern race relations:

The South had a distinctive character even before the Revolutionary War.... As its history went on to be a history of defeat, and as it has been in many respects the outcast of the nation since, its unity of feeling has held firm, even though conditions are constantly changing. (108-9)

That "unity of feeling" does not cross the color line, but the "history of defeat" does.

Jumping Jim Crow

[Julian] saw no reason to let the lesson [his mother] had had go without backing it up with an explanation of its meaning. She might as well be made to understand what had happened to her. "Don't think that was just an uppity Negro woman," he said. "That was the whole colored race which will no longer take your condescending pennies.... What this all means," he said, "is that the old world is gone. The old manners are obsolete and your graciousness is not worth a damn.... You aren't who you think you are," he said.... "You needn't act as if the world had come to an end," he said, "because it hasn't. From now on you've got to live in a new world and face a few realities for a change. Buck up," he said, "it won't kill you." (O'Connor, "Everything that Rises" *Collected* 499)

In "Everything that Rises Must Converge," O'Connor prophesied against the new sins that were being committed in the attempt to correct ancient evils... In willful defiance of [his mother's] segregationist attitudes, and in attempted solidarity with a victim of racial injustice, Julian sits down by a black man on a bus. The Negro instantly penetrates the self-seeking dimension in such white "charity," brusquely refusing Julian's attempt to use him as the means for practicing his own moral hygiene. ...The black mother is infuriated. Blinded by a racial rage that makes her unable to distinguish a kindly from a condescending gesture, she lashes out in murderous fury, striking Julian's mother to the ground and giving her a fatal stroke. Yet even as she dies the white lady remains gracious. In her addled state of mind, she calls out for Caroline, the black nurse from her childhood. (Wood 3)

What is most ironic about the defeat of the South in the Civil War is that while the War Between the States was lost, the battle between the races continued to be fought. Rather than uniting the South against its victors, the War divided it against itself, along the color line. Dominance of white ideology was one victory that carried the day. The theme of white superiority is central in O'Connor's "Everything that Rises Must Converge." Julian's mother is part of the old Southern aristocracy—a descendant of the Godhigh clan—once prominent slaveholders. She is having a difficult time adjusting to the changing mores of the New South, which do not recognize her antebellum lineage and heritage. "You remain what you are," she tells Julian, "Your great-grand-father had a plantation and two hundred slaves." When Julian reminds his mother that identities do change, since there are no longer any slaves, she retorts, "They were better off when they were.... They should rise, yes, but on their side of the fence" (*Collected* 487).

Jim Crow took hold as the New World was becoming the New South, as the lifesource of slavery was being painfully uprooted. This modified form of slavery virtually reinstated policies enforced during legal slavery. In addition to carrying over the terminology of slavery—"masters," and "freeholders" in place of slaveholders; "servants" and "apprentices" in place of slaves—practices such as enforcing curfews, requiring "servants" to have passes to leave plantations, and criminalizing peaceful assembly were enforced. As in slavery, corporal punishment could be applied to any who violated those codes. Vagrancy laws extended to freedmen who were unable to provide proof of residence; or were caught fishing, trespassing on public property, or hunting without a license (new features of state legal codes). Those who were tried and found to be guilty of vagrancy—essentially homelessness—were assigned to work on neighboring plantations or public grounds—instituting the prison chain gangs of today.

Once the strong-arm of legalized subjugation was lifted, it became more imperative for social custom to replace it. Jim Crow "laws" filled the void of uncertainty as to how the races would then interact. They reinforced or solidified the status of Southern whites who were reeling from Confederate defeat. It became custom, for instance, for blacks to step off the sidewalk and into the street to allow 'safe' passage for whites. O'Connor, in fact, sets the stage for "Everything that Rises" by describing the fear Julian's mother felt: "She would not ride the buses [to "reducing class"] by herself at night since they had been integrated" (*Collected* 487). Also, it was deemed disrespectful for blacks to make direct eye contact with whites. Blacks were called by their first—or given—names, while whites reserved the privileges of title: Mr., Mrs., Ma'am, or Sir. Segregated eating, restroom, and conveyance facilities relegated blacks to inferior status. Later, the landmark desegregation case of *Brown-v-the Board of Education* would admonish its precedent *Plessey-v-Ferguson*: "Separate but equal is inherently un-equal."

Undoubtedly, the worst aspect of Jim Crow was the vigilante justice practiced by groups like the KKK. Blacks such as the Negro mother in “Everything that Rises,” who didn’t stay on “their side of the fence,” were upsetting the natural order of the South. Those uppity blacks who wanted dignity, education, good jobs, and nice homes in good neighborhoods, were often targeted for racial intimidation and violence. The most shameful of those cases occurred when the Klan, and others who felt that justice in the guise of white privilege was on their side, committed cross-burnings, quarterings, and lynchings to curb black progress. Even today, the symbol of the noose represents such a visceral threat for blacks that it is considered a form of “hate speech.” How then could mystery and manners compensate for those and other ways racism was rhetorically inscribed through language, societal practices, and visual representations in the South?

Writing Whiteness: Distortion, Not Abstraction

There are several “schools” of literature in which O’Connor’s work might fall. She is a Southern writer, a Catholic writer, possibly even a feminist writer, given her portrayals of strong, self-willed female characters. But the descriptor that O’Connor found most apropos for her fiction is the term that best captures the sublime dimensions in her work—the *grotesque*. The moniker refers to a heightened tone in her writing, a sense of the absurd that is deeply rooted in the real. O’Connor reveled in her membership in the “Southern School” of literature. She acknowledged that the style conjured up images of “Gothic monstrosities” and “preoccupation with everything deformed and grotesque” (*Mystery* 28). Real, O’Connor felt, is what all fiction, all art, must be—but a certain kind of real. She described her representation of Southern reality in a May 1955 letter to Ben Griffith, “I am interested in making up a good case for distortion as I am coming to believe it is the only way to make people see” (*Habit* 79). She clarified to John Lynch, “I think I approve of distortion but not of abstraction” (115).

O'Connor insists that her work is not naturalistic —not realistic in any *expected* sense of the term. Neither, she argues, is her work abstract. What distortion offers that abstraction lacks is representation of reality. "I have to distort the look of things," she tells Joel Wells, "in order to represent as I see them both the mystery and the fact" (*Conversations* 88-9). Emphasizing heightened contrasts between Southern blacks and whites, just as between the socially adept and "idiots," is a key feature of O'Connor's style. "Distortion," she writes, "is an instrument; exaggeration has a purpose... This is not the kind of distortion that destroys; it is the kind that reveals, or should reveal" (*Mystery* 162). Moreover, distortion signals her self-conscious use of humor as social commentary on her subjects, whether they are "white trash," or "nigger." She joked when asked to give a presentation justifying her use of distortion that she should title her talk "something like The Freak in Modern Fiction" (*Collected* 947). The "freak" is disturbing she suggests because he is like us —not a "whole man" (*Mystery* 133).

O'Connor also uses humor in a self-effacing way when questioned about her literary technique, as when she writes to Alice Morris, "I don't deserve any credit for turning the other cheek as my tongue is always in it" (86). Yet in her more serious moments she offers Griffith and other writers of the era suggestions for handling *pathos* in fiction through distortion, a primarily visual transfiguration: "The first thing is to see the people [characters] at every minute.... You have got to learn to paint with words. You have to learn to do this unobtrusively of course." The purpose of this is to present characters who are sensational and readily identifiable by the audience: "The reader should see them, should feel from seeing them what their conversation is going to be almost before he hears it. Let the things he sees make the pathetic effects.... Show... things and you don't have to say them" (86). Distortion is an important technique in O'Connor's use of the grotesque. Her fictional distortions form racial *iconismos*.

O'Connor believed in stretching the truth for her art, but she also believed that her art was true. Understanding this dichotomy is key to contextualizing her racial consciousness, her ideology of whiteness. She establishes her voice as a writer by using a literary paradigm that cultural critic Jamie Winders calls a "whiteness-as-power-framework," power being only one aspect of whiteness (46). O'Connor herself explains it this way, "You have to be able to dominate the existence that you characterize. That is why I write about people who are more or less primitive.... I can project a Hulga" (106). "In art," she writes to Mrs. Rumsey Haynes, "you are impressing an idea on matter and this gives a sense that you do not have in real life. You use reality to make a different kind of reality" (175). In her own art, O'Connor metaphorically follows the advice she offers in a 1953 letter to Fitzgerald: "I hope you are keeping the whip hand on all your help and learning to act like a tyrant" (65). As narrator, she rules the roost in her fiction.

O'Connor's proactive positioning of subjectivity in her work complies with the sense of privilege in most whiteness studies. Even though her characterizations of racial types are both humorous and insightful, her use of racial profiling as a form of silhouette is stinging and unnerving. Her racial types include blacks who objectively conform to the worst fears and reservations of whites. Her whites are myopic and not self-aware. While vividly rendered, there is a stagnancy in her character portrayals that suggests the unyielding persistence of racism and makes it that much easier to observe and critique. That is all the more poignant because her characters, like most stereotypes, resonate so strongly with "truth." Joel Wells observes, "The people she writes about are real. Not in the literal sense of being copies from life, but as types which still exist in the South, not evident to tourists perhaps, but there all the same.... This doesn't make them mythical monsters" (Wells, qtd. in *Conversations* 86-7). These "types" are *characterismos*, *iconismos*, profiles, and silhouettes—*a la* Lavater—which shape O'Connor's creations.

Geography and the Grotesque

In many ways, O'Connor's content and style of delivery could only grow out of a Southern experience. Southerners alone are famous for being subject to such "excess and eccentricity" according to Tom Wingo, a Charleston, South Carolina native depicted as the title character in the Barbra Streisand movie, *Prince of Tides*. It is O'Connor's response to this excess that makes her work so striking and memorable. Alice Walker, from the neighboring town of Eatonton, Georgia, writes of her virtual literary kin:

Whether one 'understands' her stories or not, one knows her characters are new and wondrous creations in the world and that not one of her stories—not even the earliest ones in which her consciousness of racial matters had not evolved sufficiently to be interesting or to differ much from the insulting and ignorant racial stereotyping that preceded it—could have been written by anyone else. ("Beyond" 56-57)

O'Connor had much to say about her own extraordinary approach in representing her unique homeland. She speaks openly about this in a series of interviews transcribed in *Conversations with Flannery O'Connor*. Early on in her career she eschewed the labels of "Catholic writer" or "Southern writer," telling Harvey Breit, for example, "My people could come from anywhere. But naturally since I know the South, they speak with a Southern accent" (qtd. in Magee 11). Later she embraced those cultural associations.

Her identification with the literary tradition of the Southern grotesque grew to be seminal for O'Connor's work. This is true largely because she was not daunted by the contradictions she observed there. She notes for example, "In the South segregation is segregation" (59). And only months later she defended the region: "The South is not the Bible Belt for nothing" (71). About her role as a writer of Southern fiction utilizing the techniques of the grotesque, she tells Betsy Lochridge, "I am engaged in the reasonable use of the unreasonable.... What's reasonable is seldom safe and always exciting" (39). And she later offers this explanation of the grotesque to Betsy Fancher, "To the hard of hearing you shout and to the almost blind you draw large and startling figures" (113).

Yet, while the form is particularly suited to the eccentricities of Southern culture, the grotesque is not exclusive to the South. O'Connor, in fact, may have been familiar with another regional writer who featured the technique—the mid-Westerner, Sherwood Anderson. In *Winesberg, Ohio*, the collection of stories believed to be his best work, he crafts a story cycle based on the singular inhabitants of the makeshift town who embody the oxymoron of universal peculiarities. The author himself perhaps best describes his praxis in “The Book of the Grotesque,” one of the stories in the collection:

At his desk the writer worked for an hour. In the end he wrote a book which he called “The Book of the Grotesque.” It was never published but I saw it once and it made an indelible impression on my mind. The book had one central thought that is very strange and has always remained with me. By remembering it I have been able to understand many people and things that I was never able to understand before. The thought was involved but a simple statement of it would be something like this: That in the beginning when the world was young there were a great many thoughts but no such thing as a truth. Man made the truths himself and each truth was a composite of a great many vague thoughts. All about the world were the truths and they were all beautiful.... It was the truths that made the people grotesques. The old man had quite an elaborate theory concerning the matter. It was his notion that the moment one of the people took one of the truths to himself, called it his truth, and tried to live his life by it, he became a grotesque and the truth he embraced became a falsehood. (2)

Anderson alludes as such to the indeterminacy of the interpretive turn involved in characterizing or profiling human traits, and the consequences thereof. He expresses empathy with a desire to “understand many people and things that I was never able to understand before” in keeping with—in O'Connor’s case—the integration of the races in the post-Civil War South. Employing his unique version of the *iconismos*, or verbal silhouette, he crafts a semiotics of “truths” from “a great many [vague] thoughts.” Through his fiction, Anderson develops and demonstrates an “elaborate theory” that adherence to the composite of these man-made “truths” can backfire—can in fact merge into falsity, creating types of individuals who seek only to “type” other individuals, and who thereby become similitudes of the very things they create—the grotesque.

Set likewise in small-time Americana, Anderson's use of the grotesque in his storytelling centers as much or more on the corporal macabre in a physical—even carnal—sense, than O'Connor's focus on distorting cultural nuances. For example, in Anderson's short story "Hands," Wing Biddlebaum, a teacher of young boys, is accused of inappropriate contact with one of his charges, largely for the gentle use of his hands to show affection—"the piston rods of his machinery of expression" (1 of 4). Of Biddlebaum's hands, the narrator notes that describing them would be "a job for a poet," a job that bears similarity to Anderson's own work with the grotesque. He writes, "Biddlebaum's hands became his distinguishing feature, the source of his fame. Also, they made more grotesque an already grotesque and elusive individuality" (2 of 4).

And while highlighting the individual, Anderson also invokes some cultural references. For instance, one overlap between Anderson's use of the grotesque in "Hands" and some religious references in O'Connor's corpus of work is his allusion to instances of pedophilia in the Catholic Church. At the end of the story, drifting off of a reverie of being with "the boy who was the medium through which he expressed his love of man," Biddlebaum, on his knees picking up fallen breadcrumbs, is likened to "a priest engaged in some service of his church." Anderson explains, "The nervous expressive fingers flashing in and out of the light, might well have been mistaken for the fingers of the devotee going swiftly through decade after decade of his rosary" (4 of 4).



Figure 17: Sherwood Anderson

A Grotesque Word

Meanwhile, O'Connor's seemingly indiscriminate use of the n-word is a prime illustration of her own particular use of the grotesque. It exemplifies Morrison's "willful critical blindness," since the term has never been a race-neutral signifier. In *Nigger: The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word*, Randall Kennedy, Professor of Legal Studies at Harvard, provides a context within *juris prudence* for what he calls the "rhetoric of complexity." He refers to "nigger" as the most racially offensive epithet in the English language—except when it is not. Although Kennedy recounts case upon case of tort and criminal offenses which hinge upon the use of the racial slur (several of them involving physical violence), ultimately he argues that the term is mutative, that its character changes according to speaker, voice, motive, and application.

To prove his point, Kennedy tells personal anecdotes about use of the term within his own family and social community. About a grandmother who, like the comedian Chris Rock, was careful to distinguish between black people (decent, law-abiding family folk) and *niggers* (the low-life, criminal element of the race). About how black people (particularly black youth) have *flipped the script* on the term, seeking to transform a stinging racial assault into a term of endearment within the culture (similar to the use of the word *bad* to mean *good*). He justifies the use of this term as a social signifier that operates within the cultural community, even when it cannot be used to the same effect by those outside of it. Further, Kennedy uses his sharp legal wits to account for defensible use of the term by whites. For instance, he not only supports but also admires Mark Twain's use of the n-word in *Huckleberry Finn*. Twain's use, he insists, came at the cost of white superiority, not in recognition of it. He credits Twain with being able to convey in satire what many blacks would like to accomplish in politics: equality between the Hucks and Jims of the world.

O'Connor's use of the term, however, is more questionable in that her motives are more opaque. She ascribes no political significance to its use in either her letters or her fiction—this in spite of its history, and in spite of her strong observance of and respect for the South's rich racial past. In his tome, Kennedy delineates the tortuous route of the term from slavery and what was once upheld as an obvious example of "fighting words"—rhetoric legally recognized to elicit strong, even violent, response—to the current practice of what he calls the "mere-words" doctrine, in which the use of *mere* words, no matter how offensive or disturbing, falls short of justifying any strong actions against the speaker. Still he notes that there are no comparable derogatory terms for any other ethnic group which can rival the gold standard, *nigger*. Moreover, despite its more colloquial use, particularly in rap and hip hop vernacular, the term remains a form of hate-speech in common quarters.

Yet O'Connor neither condones nor condemns it. Her rampant use of "nigger" however, is telling. Both her letters and stories are littered with it. It is even in the title of one of her own favorite stories, "The Artificial Nigger." Writing to Father John McCown about the story, she says, "there is a good deal more in it than I understand myself" (*Habit* 140). Part of what she comes to understand is the term's strong potential for offense, a possibility to which she seemingly remains insensitive, even once it is brought to her attention. Although she remarks that "There is nothing that screams out the tragedy of the South like what my uncle calls 'nigger statuary'" (101), the tragedy of the sign appears to have little influence on her actions. She recounts her intransigence in a joint interview with Robert Penn Warren, in which she explains, "The title was so dominant.... then, when I sent the story to Mr. Ransom, he said, 'Well, we'd better not use this title. You know, it's a tense situation. We don't want to hurt anybody's feelings.' I stood out for my title" (*Conversations* 21). Obstinacy trumped sensitivity!

Context too can deepen understanding. For example, in “The Artificial Nigger” Mr. Head warns his grandson Nelson that even though the boy is excited about his upcoming visit to Atlanta, he might not like “the city” after all because it is “full of niggers” (*Collected* 212). The implication is one of danger and foreboding, which is later reinforced on the train when Mr. Head tells Nelson that in the dining car, “They rope them off” to keep them separate from whites (217). Animus is further fueled in the child when Nelson does not recognize the first black man he sees as a “nigger” and is angry that his grandfather has misled him by telling him that all niggers are black. “You never said they were tan. How do you expect me to know anything when you ain’t tell me right?” he asks angrily. “You’re just ignorant is all” his grandfather answers (215). And suddenly implication becomes a matter-of-fact: a black is a black is a black is a “nigger.” In other words, Mr. Head seems to tell him, ‘If you’ve seen one, you’ve seen them all.’

O’Connor’s saga and Nelson’s life lessons continue as he and Mr. Head arrive in Atlanta. They wander the streets, drifting into a black neighborhood, fearful that they will never see white faces again. Nelson has at least three moments of revelation while visiting the city—one, of his dependence upon Mr. Head as a spiritual guide to help navigate the new world—this “nigger heaven” (*Collected* 222)—another, of encountering a young woman, “a black mountain of maternity,” (*Habit* 78) which triggers a sexual awakening in the young boy—and the third, the sighting of the lawn jockey which gives the story its title. To help Nelson (and himself) put this artifact into context, Mr. Head remarks, “They ain’t got enough real ones here. They got to have an artificial one” (*Collected* 230). In offering her motivations behind the story, O’Connor tells Ben Griffith that she designed images to show their effects upon Nelson (here Nelson embodies the innocence of whiteness), to “suggest the mystery of existence to him,” and to give him a shock—“to start those black forms moving up from his unconscious” (*Habit* 78).

And that is only one attempt at self-theorizing in O'Connor's fiction. Although there is some constancy in her views, there is also variation. "I can't concede that I'm a fascist...." she wrote to "A," "policy and politics generally go contrary to principle" (99). She often displayed her sense of humor, joking with Elizabeth Fenwick, "I am becoming mighty unreconstructed" (*Collected* 916). Then, she seemed penitent, writing to "A" on January 31, 1959, regarding a talk she was scheduled to deliver at the University of Chicago, "I am going to read 'A Good Man is Hard to Find' deleting the paragraph about the little nigger who doesn't have any britches on. I can write with ease what I forbear to read" (*Habit* 317). More often than not, however, she was unwilling or perhaps unable to articulate her driving forces, telling "A", "Now I understand that something of oneself gets through and often something that one is not conscious of" (*Habit* 105). And she stays consistent with that theme, writing again to "A", "I certainly have no idea how I have written about some of the things I have, as they are things I am not conscious of having thought about one way or the other" (*Habit* 180).

Although he insists that O'Connor's use of racial slurs don't make her racist, Ralph C. Wood, writing in "Flannery O'Connor's Racial Morals and Manners," remarks, "Even allowing for japing self-mockery, O'Connor's liberal use of the word 'nigger' discloses an illiberal numbness to the evils that blacks suffered in the segregated South." He adds, "Such racial rancor runs deep in O'Connor" (1). Having said this, however, Wood proceeds to ameliorate that rancor by suggesting that there is a necessary split between O'Connor's public and private views—with the former reflecting her truth:

We need to take O'Connor's public work much more seriously than her personal letters. That she said uncharitable things about blacks in private but treated them with unfailing charity in her public essays and fiction does not make her an oleaginous hypocrite. It reveals...that her thoughtful convictions triumphed over her doubtful opinions. (2)

But there is room for debate as to the "unfailing charity" in O'Connor's fictional works.

Stock in Charity

Wood cites a prime example to demonstrate O'Connor's benevolence towards blacks in her fictional works. According to him, "O'Connor reveals the nature of such a miracle [as grace] in her favorite story, 'The Artificial Nigger.' She was fond of it, I suspect, because it is a work that inverts a racist symbol into an emblem of antiracist redemption" (6). He goes on to describe Mr. Head and Nelson's sojourn in the city and subsequent foray into a white suburb where they encounter a lawn jockey—the "black emblem of redemption." Upon this discovery, Wood writes, the two of them stand "transfixed and transformed before the wretched statue." He adds, "Though meant to signal the triumph of whites over blacks, [the statue] becomes a secular crucifix to these mutually sinful kinsman" (7). The upshot of the story, by Wood's light, is something far more meaningful than a caution about the immoralities of racism, its social construction, or even projections of racial reconciliation. He sees O'Connor as up to something "far deeper" than any morality tale. Wood claims O'Connor, "wants to demonstrate why [the] Negro remains so regally serene despite the discrimination he suffers" (6).

And he is preceded in these religious associations by O'Connor's own statements about the story. For instance, she introduces a Biblical allusion when she writes to "A," "I have often had the experience of finding myself not as adequate to the situation as I thought I would be, but there turned out to be a great deal more to ['The Artificial Nigger'].... And then there's Peter's denial" (*Habit* 101). In addition, she reinforces the influence of spiritual values upon her writing. The sacrificial nature of the Negro's response to mistreatment echoes the crucifixion of Christ, as she elaborates to Griffith in 1955, the year of the story's publication: "What I had in mind to suggest with The Artificial Nigger was the redemptive quality of the Negro's suffering for us all" (78). And at the same time it invokes a stock literary and rhetorical figure—the *noble savage*.

In drawing on this trope, O'Connor joins a distinguished literary tradition. The term *noble savage* expresses a concept of the natural man—man in his pure, primitive form, unencumbered by the decadence of civilization. The concept is associated with the Roman rhetor Cicero, whose detailed letters include in-depth character-typing and analysis. In English, the phrase first appeared in the poet Henry Dryden's heroic play, *The Conquest of Granada* (1672). Then Aphra Behn, a female British predecessor of Woolf's, popularized its usage in her 1688 novel *Oroonoko or the Royal Slave*, based on a slave revolt in Surinam in the West Indies. It was more recently depicted by the racist representations of Charles Dickens in his 1851 essay, "The Noble Savage." The phrase is a salient oxymoron used for stereotyped characters such as the Virtuous Milkmaid, the Servant-More-Clever-than-the-Master, and the "Wise" Egyptian/Persian/Chinaman. The entire notion is predicated upon a presumed racial and cultural superiority which gained popularity alongside the vogue in scientific racism following the Civil War.



Figure 18: 1776 Performance of Thomas Southerne's *Oroonoko*



Figure 19: Aphra Behn by Mary Beale

It is the use of imagery that co-joins suffering with redemption that most links O'Connor with the stock character of the noble savage. She was greatly influenced by the teachings of Teilhard de Chardin on *excentration* "the death of the ego as it expands outwards towards the divine Other," says Cynthia L. Seel (173). O'Connor also drew on his concept of "passive diminishment,"—"the serene acceptance of whatever affliction or loss cannot be changed by any means," as Fitzgerald writes. O'Connor "must have reasoned that the eventual effect of such diminishment, accompanied by a perfecting of the will, is to bring increase, which is not to say that acceptance made matters easy" (*Habit* 53). Fitzgerald suggests that O'Connor identified with her literary subjects by way of her own ailments with the degenerative disease of lupus. O'Connor writes, "It makes very little difference what you call it. As the niggers say, I have the misery" (74). She believed that her illness and work coincided: "Vocation implies limitation" (221).

O'Connor's description of the garden statue in "The Artificial Nigger" conveys these opposing qualities of baseness and grandiosity. As Nelson and Mr. Head observe,

It was not possible to tell if the artificial Negro were meant to be young or old; he looked too miserable to be either. He was meant to look happy because his mouth was stretched up at the corners but the chipped eye and the angle he was cocked at gave him a wild look of misery instead. (*Collected* 229)

Wood uses the rhetorical *principle of charity* to lend the most positive interpretation to O'Connor's story. He writes, "This [statue] not only illuminates the evident evils of slavery and discrimination but discloses the subtle grace inherent in suffering" (8). This image of long-suffering black manhood may be a fine spiritual notion, but it does not present a workable practice in commonplace interactions between the races. O'Connor understands this as well: "The uneducated Southern Negro is not the clown he is made out to be. He's a man of very elaborate manners and great formality which he uses superbly for his own protection and to insure his own privacy" (qtd. in Fitzgerald xviii).

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
 It hides our cheeks and shades our
 eyes, —
 This debt we pay to human guile;
 With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
 And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be over-wise,
 In counting all our tears and sighs?
 Nay, let them only see us, while
 We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
 To thee from tortured souls arise.
 We sing, but oh the clay is vile
 Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
 But let the world dream otherwise,
 We wear the mask!

“We Wear the Mask”
 Paul Lawrence Dunbar



Figure 20: Paul Lawrence Dunbar,
 Sketch by Norman B. Wood, 1897

This poem from Dunbar’s *Lyrics of a Lowly Life* reflects the pride and privacy of black men to which O’Connor alludes. Even though it advocates donning a *poker face* rather than baring a wounded soul, Dunbar’s work unveils the caul of suffering he felt as a newly freed black, following the emancipation of slaves. As a citizen and artist of the Reconstruction, he knows and does not minimize or romanticize that pain. To some extent, he has done as Wood explains of Southern blacks: “They have survived their suffering in very large part through their comically mannered means for fending off evil” (Wood 4). This variation upon the trope of the noble savage is the Trickster archetype popularized in ethnography by Victor Turner. As Seel explains: “oft-times, given the widely insinuated link between the idealized Southern woman and the slave population...we find as well instances where a black character as Trickster figure... functions in an ironic modality in order to awaken the protagonist...” (101).

American-African

An awakening and examination of white consciousness is what Morrison is up to in *Playing in the Dark*. In describing the term *American Africanism* as “a fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm, and desire that is uniquely American,” (44) she offers a stark contrast to what Lewis R. Gordon identifies as the void of whiteness (6). For whites, Morrison claims, *American Africanism* is a “projection of the not-me”—the ultimate otherness—as well as the “not-free” (37-38). Hoping to trigger the epiphany Seel describes in O’Connor, Morrison asks: “In what ways does the imaginative encounter with Africanism enable white writers to think about themselves?” (51). She responds, “If we follow through on the self-reflexive nature of these encounters with Africanism, it falls clear: images of blackness can be evil and protective, rebellious and forgiving, fearful and desirable—all of the self-contradictory features of the self” (59). *American Africanism*, then, is a projection of whiteness, not a reflection of blackness.

And according to Morrison, the very emphasis upon racial difference is a literary expression of xenophobia designed to isolate blackness as inevitably “Other.” She explains, “Race, in fact, now functions as a metaphor so necessary to the construction of Americanness that it rivals the old pseudo-scientific and class-informed racisms whose dynamics we are more used to deciphering” (47). In other words, Lavater’s great work is now being performed with rhetoric, rather than with mechanical calipers. These contrasts have been and continue to be dichotomized as polarities of lightness and darkness—of “us,” and “our kind,” versus “them” and “those people.” For Gordon, this exoticism of blacks is an especially pernicious form of bad faith—negation of the self. He writes in clarifying this: “Bad faith can...be shown to be an effort to deny the blackness within by way of asserting the supremacy of whiteness. It can be regarded as an effort to purge blackness from the self and the world, symbolically and literally” (6).

By contrast, the experiences of the Middle Passage are at the root of what we now call African-American culture. For example, “Ebonics” or “Black English” is one of the patois, like Creole, which resulted from the blending of languages and dialects the Africans brought from their native tribes. As an amalgam of various languages (Yoruba, Swahili, French), Ebonics falls into the category of what Valerie Kinloch calls “linguistic diversities.” Moreover, in addition to the literary genres of the narrative and the Negro spiritual, other remnants of African culture have been inscribed in the US. Introducing words like *okra* and *goobers* (or peanuts) into the melting pot of American vernacular, and maintaining traditions like the pouring of libations—spilling a bit of wine or spirits to honor the ancestors—were ways Africans reflected pride in their heritage, even while becoming immersed in American society. As part of their acclimation, they saw literacy in ‘the master’s’ language as a key to Americanization, as one more step toward liberation and equality. Later, Albert Memmi will advocate using the master’s tools against him in order to combat racist and colonial praxes, and Kara Walker will comply.

Nevertheless, questions about acclimation and assimilation have persisted as Africa has made its imprint upon American identity. In addressing “the Negro problem” in America, DuBois encapsulates the dilemma of “double consciousness”:

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, — this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face. (qtd. in Hill 738)

Representing a people who were at that time only one generation out of slavery, he advocates the most culturally adept response to *duo-ethnicity*—an embracing of both sets of characteristics. Yet whiteness is typically the adverse—a denial of *any* ethnicity.

Blinded by the White

In a sense then whiteness is a rhetorical paradigm appropriately characterized as self-delusion. It is, as Morrison explains, a “dehistoricizing allegory...[that] produces foreclosure rather than disclosure” (68). In “White Means Never Having to Say You’re Ethnic,” Pamela Perry shows how detachment from prior-national allegiance has served to enable the development and perpetuation of white identity in America. She notes that in a study of inner-city high school students, “...white identity was understood to have no ties or allegiances to European ancestry and culture, no ‘traditions.’ To the white youth, only ‘ethnic people have such ties to the past’” (9). But there is a strange irony at work here. It would take over 350 years from the 1619 landing of the first indentured servants on the coast of Jamestown to the post-Civil Rights era of the 1960s for Africans to earn the imprimatur of citizenship and become “hyphenated Americans.”

By contrast, being hyphenated was a status easily obtained by the European immigrants who brought the Africans to this country. They almost immediately became Polish-, Irish-, Italian-, or Jewish-Americans, as Caryl Phillips writes in *The New World Order*, “Their ‘twoness’ would be acceptable” (11). Then, in short order, the identities of European offspring in America were collapsed and subsumed under the more ubiquitous and power-laden signifier—white. Raka Shome notes this tendency in his essay on whiteness in *Communication Quarterly*,

Within European history, descriptions of Whiteness are absent due to denial of imperialism and this leaves a blank in the place of knowledge of the destructive effects of wielding power. An identity based on power never has to develop consciousness of itself as responsible, it has no sense of its limits. (202)

A huge part of recognizing what whiteness *is* includes recognizing its impact upon the lives and livelihoods of others. Ignorance is no excuse of the law, and that applies to the laws of human nature as well. For better or for worse, whiteness *is* as whiteness *does*.

Literature provides an excellent stage for acting out whiteness. Bowles writes, "The situation of whiteness is that of a body historicized and racialized to the point where its material particularity is obscured," (39). This is as true inside of literature as it is outside of it. A grand actor on the proscenium of literary whiteness is Mrs. Turpin of O'Connor's story, "Revelation." Mrs. Turpin is a woman of heart and mind, although both could use improvement. She is a character that Alice Walker could be referencing when she writes, "O'Connor's characters—whose humanity if not their sanity is taken for granted, and who are miserable, ugly, narrow-minded, atheistic, and of intense racial smugness and arrogance, with not a graceful, pretty one anywhere who is not, at the same time a joke—shocked and delighted me" (52). Except that she is not an atheist—not by her own account. She speaks often to God, thanking Him for her good fortune in being well born: "'If it's one thing I am, ' Mrs. Turpin said with feeling, 'it's grateful. When I think who all I could have been myself and what all I got, a little of everything, and a good disposition besides, I just feel like shouting 'Thank you, Jesus, for making everything the way it is!' It could have been different'" (O'Connor *Collected* 645).

Yes, things could have been very different indeed. In an alternate universe, Mrs. Turpin's fate might have been far less providential. There but for the grace of God, she believes, reminding her Creator, "You could have made me trash. Or a nigger"(652). God only knows which of those would be worse. When she weighs the options, she lays out her choices thus: if she were a nigger, she would "act like one. Lay down in the middle of the road and stop traffic. Roll on the ground" (652-3). If, on the other hand, God had seen fit to make her "white trash," then she "could quit working and take it easy and be filthy...loungue about the sidewalks all day drinking root beer. Dip snuff and spit in every puddle and have it all over my face. I could be nasty" (652). Either way, Mrs. Turpin's loss would also be the reader's loss of such a forceful character.

In the language of whiteness, and of racial profiling, anatomy is destiny. These possibilities of predetermination consume Mrs. Turpin in her waking moments and in her “dark night of the soul” (*Habit* 100). O’Connor shows her inner turmoil:

Sometimes at night when she couldn’t go to sleep, Mrs. Turpin would occupy herself with the question of who she would have chosen to be if she couldn’t have been herself. If Jesus had said to her before he made her, ‘There’s only two places available for you. You can either be a nigger or white trash,’ what would she have said? ... She would have wiggled and squirmed and begged and pleaded but it would have been no use and finally she would have said, ‘All right, make me a nigger then—but that don’t mean a trashy one.’ And he would have made her a neat clean respectable woman, herself but black. (*Collected* 635-6)

This self-identified model of white womanhood makes a practical case for the convergence of race and class, as she ponders not just skin color but culture as well. Yet this too is an oxymoron, as whiteness is in many ways not culture at all, but “anticulture.” According to Perry, “As the norm and standard, white culture has no definition, only those who *deviate* from the norm have ‘culture.’” And she continues, “therein lies the toxicity of the construction of white as the (cultureless) norm: it serves as a basis on which to measure the humanity and social standing of others” (60).

Since whiteness *is* as whiteness *does*, whiteness in “Revelation” is the nadir of shortsightedness and self-deception. Gordon explains,

That whiteness is a project—an ongoing choice of identity—makes whiteness a goal of the white in an antiblack world. The problem, however, is that whiteness cannot be a project at all without a given condition of blackness. It is the realization of blackness, or potential blackness, in every white that makes his whiteness an object of his own desire. (148)

O’Connor’s view is far more benign as she defends her methodology of characterization:

I don’t believe that you can ask an artist to be affirmative any more than you can ask him to be negative. The human condition requires both states in truth.... I mortally and strongly defend the right of the artist to select a negative aspect of the world to portray.... You are only enabled to see what is black by having light to see it by.... Furthermore, the light you see by may be altogether outside of the work itself. The question is not is this negative or positive, but is it believable. (*Habit* 173)

And the answer is yes—O'Connor's characters are credible, despite reflecting a very specific racial perspective. Even she recognizes the limits of her first person point of view, and is frank about having an abbreviated, rather than extended, angle on her black subjects. But she takes her shortsightedness in stride, writing about it in a general way to "A" in February 1956, explaining, "I see only what is outside and what sticks out a mile, such things as the sun that nobody has to be bright to see..." (141). And later,

The two colored people in "The Displaced Person" are on this place now. The old man is 84 but vertical or more or less so. He doesn't see too good and the other day he fertilized some of my mother's bulbs with worm medicine for the calves. I can only see them from the outside. I wouldn't have the courage of Miss Shirley Ann Grau to go inside their heads. (159)

Moreover, her perspective, and her means of expressing it, had changed very little by Fall 1960. Then she told a set of interviewers in response to why blacks don't figure more prominently in her work, "I don't understand [Negroes] the way I do white people. I don't feel capable of entering the mind of a Negro. In my stories they're seen from the outside. The Negro in the South is quite isolated; he has to exist by himself" (*Conversations* 59). Being isolated and viewed from the outside produces a surface profile. In accounting for the blind spots in her work and how these may reflect upon its reception, O'Connor was cavalier. She had written to "A" in December 1955 that "The subject of the moral basis of fiction is one of the most complicated and I don't doubt that I contradict myself on it, for I have no foolproof aesthetic theory" (*Habit* 123). But her responses grew coarser over time, and less self-reflective, such as when she chastises William Sessions in August of the following year that he, "cannot read a story from what [sic] get out of a letter. Nor I repeat can you...read the author by the story. You may but you shouldn't..." (170). Later she issues an almost totally Barthesian abnegation of her work—a basic credo of bad faith--claiming, "Actually a work of art exists without its author from the moment the words are on paper" (*Mystery* 126).

Shades of Grey in Whiteness

Notwithstanding her gratitude for her own station in life, fear continues to haunt Mrs. Turpin in "Revelation." Her status must strike her as—rightfully—tentative, since essentialism is a fallacy in whiteness just as in any other racial or cultural classifications. Status is very important to her and she feels compelled to monitor its fluctuations. She is no particular friend of black people—"Idiots!" Mrs. Turpin growled to herself. You could never say anything intelligent to a nigger. You could talk at them but not with them" (*Collected* 650). Still, "There's a heap of things worse than a nigger," she tells a group of women in the doctor's office. "It's all kinds of them just like it's all kinds of us" (640). One of the groups that lands in—albeit at the lower end of—the category of "us" includes those she describes as "...not white trash, just common" (636). So then, what class of humanity falls decidedly below the "nigger" class in Mrs. Turpin's estimation? Those she calls "vacant and white-trashy.... worse than niggers any day" (615).

Mrs. Turpin's nighttime reveries include creation of her own *scala natura*, her own hypothetical chain of being. Her ideal hierarchy is made up of colored people on bottom ("not the kind she would have been if she had been one of them"); then white trash; next, homeowners; "then above them the home-and-land owners"—the class "to which she and [her husband] Claud belonged." And there are others above them. They include people of a higher economic class with "a lot of money and much bigger houses." Then things get more complicated because she realizes that "class" is not a strictly economic phenomenon. Some people with money, she believes, are still "common" and don't have "good blood." Renters, too, present an ethical dilemma. All of these thoughts end up "moiling and roiling around in her head" (636). Ultimately, her place in the chain is less secure than she imagines, as other characters in the story view her differently from her self-image. One calls her "a wart hog. From hell" (647).

These divisions signal trouble in the ranks of whiteness. Blood, for example, is what Morrison calls “a pervasive fetish” of racial superiority: “black blood, white blood, the purity of blood” (68). And this is surely a concern for Claud and Mrs. Turpin, particularly as it relates to the possibilities of miscegenation. When one of the white women in the office proposes that a solution to the race problem in the South might be to send blacks back to Africa, Mrs. Turpin warns her that that will never happen. “‘Nooo,’ she said ‘They’re going to stay where they can go to New York and marry white folks and improve their color.’” Then, “‘You know what comes of that, don’t you?’ Claud asked. ‘White faced niggers,’ he said with never a smile’” (*Collected* 641).

Similar divisions among and between Southern whites and their Northern counterparts are by-products of the Civil War. In looking at these racial ruptures, it becomes apparent that “Despite the goals, which categories seek to serve, there is far greater complexity in every group and every race than they can possibly reflect” (Oguibe, qtd. in Bowles 45). In “White in All the Wrong Places,” Jamie Winders quotes Richard Dyer as noting that the antebellum South “seems to be the myth that both most consciously asserts whiteness and devastatingly undermines it” (45). The chief strain on the mythology is economic, he claims, asserting that white poverty “challenges the myth of universal white privilege, revealing in no uncertain terms that implicit connections between colour and class do not always hold” (46). The sector of Southerners he calls “crackers,” (51) “shiftless poor whites,” (53) and “white trash” is, by his account “forever stuck somewhere beneath respectability” (54) and represents a rebuke to white privilege. They cause Northerners to experience “a sense of personal defeat” that undermines their own prosperity and progress (56). Moreover, those “specimens of the white race must be credited with having reached a yet lower depth of squalid and beastly wretchedness” than even “the ordinary plantation Negro” (Andrews, qtd. in Winders 56).



Figure 21: *Pentecost*, Woodcut by Helen Siegl

Those social divisions are so strong and so deeply ingrained that Mrs. Turpin feels sure there will be a chain of being extending even into eternity. She is confident that even in heaven “There’ll still be a top and bottom!” (653). She has visions of,

...a vast horde of souls rumbling toward heaven. ... whole companies of white trash, clean for the first time in their lives, and bands of black niggers in white robes, and battalions of freaks and lunatics shouting and clapping and leaping like frogs. ... Bringing up the end of the processions was a tribe of people...like herself and Claud [who] had always had a little of everything and the God-given wit to use it right.... They were marching behind the others with great dignity, accountable as they had always been for good order and common sense and respectable behavior. They alone were on key. (654)

This story is one of O’Connor’s most tragicomic, and one of her agents pegged it as such.

[Carolyn Carver] thought [Revelation] one of my most powerful stories and probably my *blackest*. Found Ruby [Turpin] evil. Found end vision to confirm the same. Though suggested I leave it out. (*Habit* 554)

Happily, O’Connor stood by her decision to include the story in her collection. “White means never having to say you’re ethnic,” writes Perry (56). Or *sorry*, for that matter.

The Bad Faith of Whiteness

What racial ore then can be mined from the “black forms” O’Connor describes as “moving up” (*Habit* 78) from white consciousness? Morrison shares her fascination with the “mystery.” She writes about her exploration of whiteness, “I was interested... in the way black people ignite critical moments of discovery or change or emphasis in literature not written by them” (viii). One vivid example of how these processes of discovery occur is through what Morrison calls “metonymic displacement,” which she identifies as a method of color-coding that “promises much but delivers little” (68). She explains that the inherent fallacy in the use of the “shortcut” *nigger*, with “all of its color and caste implications,” is that, because the term “occupies a territory between man and animal [it] thus withholds specificity even while marking it” (71). Such liminality aligns the metonymic practice with other operatives of whiteness that reflect bad faith—its simultaneous certainty and indeterminacy—its superficially averse agency.

In *Bad Faith and Anti-Black Racism*, Gordon amplifies Sartre’s thesis of bad faith. He delineates the basic tenets of the philosophy to contextualize its use for racial analysis, explaining:

The core assumptions of bad faith are that human beings are aware, no matter how fugitive that awareness may be, of their freedoms in their various situations, that they are free choosers of various aspects of their situations, that they are consequently responsible for their conditions on some level, that they have the power to change at least themselves through coming to grips with their situations, and that there exist features of their condition which provide rich areas of interpretive investigation for the analyst or interpreter. (5)

Another tenet of bad faith is that even though racism is institutionalized within groups, its roots lie in the corporal individual, as well as in individual consciousness. He identifies racism as a negation of the humanity of human subjects *by* human subjects. This one-sided denial of humanity, moreover, is an embodiment of values—however reluctant—while disembodiment the values of those who are racism’s objects.

Whatever apprehensions she harbored about literary theory or philosophy, O'Connor was certainly aware of existentialist thought. She wrote to "A," for instance, that "the particular appeal of the poor for the fiction writer is existential not economic" (*Habit* 96), by which she infers that the writer's interest should focus on the individual, not on generalities of social or economic class. Why, then, does that ethos not apply in her treatment of blacks? The "spirit of seriousness" is a form of bad faith that further negates personal agency by reifying seemingly irrefutable and organic values over human life (Gordon 5). O'Connor subscribes to the spirit of seriousness to a great degree in deferring to Southern *moeurs*. She writes in a letter to Maryat Lee, "I observe the traditions of the society I feed on—it's only fair" (*Habit* 329). In other words, when in Rome (Georgia, of course—or even in nearby Milledgeville), do as your countrymen do. But this ethical stance is at the very heart of the racial dilemma. Bad faith enters as racist praxes are represented as amorphous and inevitably pervasive, allowing those individuals who subscribe to or tolerate them to dodge direct accountability.

And even more than bad faith, O'Connor's deference to group identity can be classified as one of the principal forms of racism: "the self-deceiving choice to believe either that one's race is the only race qualified to be considered human or that one's race is superior to other races," writes Gordon (2). In his critique of K. Anthony Appiah, Gordon delineates two philosophical tracts of racism: *extrinsic* and *intrinsic*. Extrinsic racism, he explains, occurs when people of different races are regarded as having particular features that justify judgment of their character. "The body," he insists, "is always in a situation with the perspective of the other" (35). Further, he clarifies, "the very problem of 'mind and body' is an obvious form of bad faith—the reification of consciousness" (29). Gordon considers the chance for hope in extrinsic racism because it is "a form of essentialism where there is room for some level of rational discourse" (67).

The same, however, cannot be said for intrinsic racism, which, by contrast, involves group loyalty. It holds less promise for resolution because it is deeper ingrained, and probably institutionalized. In considering this case, Gordon observes, "Intrinsic racism... apparently has no rational basis. The intrinsic racist considers himself obligated to members of his group regardless of their moral character" (67). Forti also writes about this manner of racial allegiance, stating, "...the idea of race is so effective in exalting differences and conflict, on one hand, and in nailing the individual to his collective identity, on the other" (12). According to Forti, "we can say that evolutionist racism [oversimplifies the complexities of race by] using it as an instrument for the *naturalization of social and political history*, so as to give to divisions and struggles between pure and impure human groups the force of an inevitable biological law" (12). These philosophical concepts were not entirely unfamiliar to O'Connor, though she regarded them with far less gravity. In her usual bantering style, she wrote Lee, "People are harder to handle than cows and white folks than niggers" (Habit 225).

Using the model of bad faith, Gordon offers an interpretive frame. He describes a figure he calls the "stubborn racist" who "has made a choice not to admit certain uncomfortable truths about his group and chooses not to challenge certain comfortable falsehoods about other people" (75). O'Connor's silence then may be interpreted as consent. Further, he insists, intrinsic and extrinsic racism overlap in that the extrinsic (hopeful) racist "may ultimately have to admit that what he regards as a problem with other racial groups is that they are not members of his group in the first place" (76). Either way, Morrison writes, "The subjective nature of ascribing value and meaning to color cannot be questioned this late in the twentieth century" (49). Thus, for the purposes of this study, it is less important to render a judgment on O'Connor as racist than to examine the rhetorical mechanisms by which such charges can be evaluated.

“Freedom” and the Rhetoric of Racism

O'Connor's fiction provides insight into these questions of racism and bad faith. In writing about her story, “The Artificial Nigger,” Wood surmises, “...the reason O'Connor liked this story best was that it fictionally incarnates her firmest convictions about both race and religion.... Perhaps O'Connor knew that her own racial sinfulness had been dissolved in an unbidden gift of artistic mercy” (Wood 8). He explains her “sinfulness” as primarily a sin of omission. To him, O'Connor's principle failing on race matters is not that she herself was racist, but that she never used her bully pulpit as a Christian writer to pontificate against the racism she witnessed as custom and practice in the South. Wood writes, “... it is no excuse to say that O'Connor's racial attitudes were a predictable product of her time and place.... She never criticized in open angry and unequivocal terms, the racial abomination committed in her native territory” (2).



Figure 22: Kara Walker's "Freedom Fighters for the Society of Forgotten Knowledge," 2005

But this is not O'Connor's only sin, as Wood surmises. Although he maintains that O'Connor is not a racist "at heart," he is however offended by her widespread use of "unsavory remarks about blacks." He takes her to task for her cynicism and "distaste" for the modern freedom movement, remarking, "she also reveals herself to have been deeply out of sympathy with the Civil Rights crusade of the 1960's" (1). These are fair, even generous, claims; and O'Connor's own statements back them up. They are apparent not only in her chiding chitchat with Lee: "At Emory they had a little dinner party before I talked...one gent said, 'I am working with a group on interpersonal relations.' Somebody asked what interpersonal relations were and one of the novelists said, 'He means niggers and white folks'" (*Habit* 204). It also shows up in letters to other contemporaries, such as Richard Stern, to whom she writes, "It's just like Cudden Rose says all us niggers and white folks over here are just getting along grand—at least in Georgia and Mississippi. I hear things are not so good in Chicago and Brooklyn, but you wouldn't expect them to know what to do with theirself [sic] there" (*Habit* 532).



Figure 23: Drawing of O'Connor by Barry Moser, Courtesy of GSCW

To a less charitable reader, O'Connor's rhetoric could seem fascist and xenophobic, as when she writes to Lee, "The following is good Georgia advice: don't marry no foreigner. Even if his face is white, his heart is black" (*Habit* 209). Sometimes her sarcasm borders on contempt, as when she jokes with Lee in July 1964, "The grasshopper you left in the cage for me reminded me so much of the poor colored people in the jails that I let him out and fed him to a duck. I'm sure you'll understand" (592). But no matter—Wood summarily dismisses their communications by explaining, "They playfully caricatured each other, even as they wittily parodied themselves. Lee thus appears as the ultimate bleeding-heart liberal, and O'Connor assumes the role of the unreconstructed Southern racist" (1). Yet he needn't be so obliging on O'Connor's behalf, as she is stalwart in her own defense: "The only conscience I have to examine is my own..." (*Collected* 804). And she insists, "I only worry...about serving my own artistic conscience, not a mythical set of admirers who expect a certain thing" (1015).

Antiblack Racism

In what ways does O'Connor's fiction perpetuate racism? *Playing the race card* carries such high stakes, even—and perhaps especially—in this post-race era, that racial judgments must be made very carefully. So much depends on how racism is defined. In "What is Racism?" Ashley Doane, a sociologist and whiteness scholar writes, then adds,

While there is a widespread social consensus that "racism" is an extremely negative phenomenon, there is also significant disagreement as to exactly what is 'racism.' This is important, for competing definitions of racism have significant strategic implications for racial discourse and for the changing trajectories of racial politics in the United States. (257)

Given the general social consensus that racism violates social norms and the strong negative valuation attached to the "racist" label, charges of racism are a significant rhetorical and political weapon. In the twenty-first century, no one wants to be accused of racism or to be called a racist. How racism is defined, then, becomes an important discursive tactic. Not surprisingly, authors will seek to conceptualize racism—either explicitly or implicitly—in a manner that will both strengthen their claims and weaken those of their challengers. (260)

In many ways, racism resists classification because it, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. O'Connor says racism is "often so funny that you forget it is also so terrible" (194). But for Southern blacks who have experienced this form of mental, emotional, verbal, and/or physical abuse, it lacks humor and is only terrible. Doane defines it beyond an emotional stressor, calling it a "contested concept." He explains,

What is important to emphasize... is that the differences [in individual definitions of racism] are not merely "semantics" or problems of communication; they reflect fundamentally opposite views of the US racial order. Furthermore, the contested nature of "racism" plays a significant role in recasting the politics of race and in reproducing white hegemony. (267)

His studies corroborate his view that whites are just as likely to consider blacks as holding racist opinions about them as the other way around. But he also finds that most blacks feel racism must be linked to systems of power. In other words, he concludes, blacks feel that racism is more of an action than an attitude. He offers this analysis:

In general, if racism is defined as race-based prejudice or discrimination, then it seemingly logically follows that *anyone* can be racist, including members of both dominant and oppressed groups. On the other hand, if racism is linked to institutional power, then it follows that only members of the dominant group –i.e., whites in the United States – can be racist. This distinction is politically important, for the "racist" label is a potent discursive weapon. (262)

Like Gordon, Doane finds that differences in definition, however, are less problematic than the manners in which those beliefs are held. He writes, "To the extent that individual definitions of racism become dominant, what emerges is a social world in which it is difficult to challenge or even envision institutional racism" (Doane 267). Doane also finds that competing definitions of racism lead to different conclusions: "At the core of the white racial reaction has been the recasting of racial ideologies or understandings to defend white advantages while simultaneously acknowledging the value of 'racial equality'" (259). That view is consistent with other studies on whiteness as being duplicitous—of rhetorically throwing the rock, then hiding its hand.

And, far from seeing an end to or diminishment of racism, some research is showing an upswing in antiblack racism as a backlash against the administration of President Obama. In "Black in the Age of Obama," Charles M. Blow claims that blacks are now living a "tale of two Americas" with hope on one side, and a "collapsing quality of life and amplified racial tensions" on the other. This "mixed" social and political climate portends diminished progress in education, employment, and economics:

Last year [Election 2008], blacks dared to dream anew, envisioning a future in which Obama's election would be the catalyst for an era of prosperity and more racial harmony. Now that the election's afterglow has nearly faded, the hysteria of hope is being ground against the hard stone of reality. Things have not gotten better. In many ways, they've gotten worse.

Such racism that is geared towards the oppression of blacks falls especially under the auspices of what Gordon terms "antiblack racism" (2). The matter also concerns Forti:

Racism is not simply a body of ideas accepted by intellectuals, to a greater or lesser extent in bad faith, to satisfy their need for "reaction" and for scientific positivation. The problem of racist ideology should not be analyzed in terms of its doctrinal content, but rather in terms of the strength that the assumptions of race have in activating the mechanisms of power, in generating a device for producing collective identification, and in eliminating a form of alterity that has often been created ad hoc. The identitarian construction provided by the body and by biological life is in fact an extremely powerful identitarian identification, more powerful than any other kind of communitarian rhetoric. (11)

Antiblack racism is bad faith in that it can easily be cloaked under the rhetoric of what many call "political correctness." Doane references cultural and social critics who note that, "Even those opposing racial integration or policies to reduce racial inequality often seek to establish their 'non-racist' credentials by using rhetorical buffers or 'shields' (e.g., 'I am not a racist, but . . .),' (268). Eventually, however, those frustrations show through, as an O'Connor character shows: "[Rayber] remembered Jacobs telling about lecturing at a Negro college for a week. They couldn't say Negro—nigger—colored—[they needed to say] black. Jacobs said he had come home every night and shouted 'NIGGER NIGGER NIGGER' out the back window" (*Collected* 715).

The “Antidote” to Racism

In assessing representations of racism in O'Connor's work, Wood declares that while she is unequivocally not a racist, he believes it is more important for her readers to examine their own racial attitudes. He claims, in fact, that no matter what our particular racial proclivities may be, O'Connor offers us “the real antidote to racism” (1). Just as O'Connor writes, “It requires considerable grace for two races to live together, particularly when the population is divided about 50-50 between them and when they have our particular history. It can't be done without a code of manners based on mutual charity” (*Mystery* 233), Wood's views are quite similar: “To make racial equality work socially no less than legally [in the newly integrated South] would be a matter of civil manners no less than Civil Rights” (4). O'Connor's humor, an important aspect of her ethos of mystery and manners, is the cure for racism that Wood is prescribing.

For Southern whites, mystery and manners work perhaps most effectively in the context of the grotesque. This style and genre of writing was especially suited for O'Connor because of her strong attraction to the method of distortion—deforming the material—of her work, mainly characters. She did not subscribe to either a political or an academic approach to healing race wounds, as she joked with “A,” “Anything I can't stand it's a young writer or intellectual” (*Collected* 994). And while she was proud to be the former, she would have hated to be called the latter. Her gifts were grounded in other soils, she believed, noting, “My talent lies in a kind of intellectual vaudeville. I leave them not knowing exactly what I have said but feeling that they have been inspired” (933). In 1952, she wrote to Sally Fitzgerald about winning the \$2,000.00 Kenyon Fellowship that some of the money would go for lupus treatment and some to “researches into the ways of the vulgar.... though at times I feel that a feeling for the vulgar is my natural talent and don't need any particular encouragement” (*Habit* 49).

O'Connor's "vulgar" humor reflects the wide range of emotions that characterize Southern race relations. There is, for example, fear: "The day coming," the Doctor [in "Judgment Day"] said, "when the white folks is going to be working for the colored and you might's well to git ahead of the crowd." "Be prepared [Tanner] said to himself, watching [Doctor Foley] approach to take something off him, nigger though he be. Be prepared cause you ain't got a thing to hold up to him but the skin you came in..." (*Collected* 685). There is loathing: "They were as sorry a crew as he had worked.... They thought there was a new Lincoln elected who was going to abolish work" (681). There is contempt: "It's nice to have something you can be completely crass about. The only thing I would positively object to would be somebody turning one of my colored idiots into a hero" (547). There is irony: "I don't know if [I] ought to buy AT&T or go in for colored rental property. I am wondering if I own colored houses with outdoor privies that drain into the water supply if my burden of social guilt will be so great it offsets the little income?" (*Habit* 66). There is dependency: "I will not have my niggers upset [Mrs. Shortley tells her son in "The Displaced Person"]. I cannot run this place without niggers. I can run it without you but not without them" (*Collected* 314). Resignation:

I sure am tired of buttering up niggers, but you got to love em if you want em to work for you. When they come in the morning, I run out and I say, 'Hi yawl this morning'? And when Claud drives them off to the field I just wave to beat the band and they just wave back.... And when they come in from the field I run out with a bucket of icewater. That's the way it's going to be from now on,' she said. 'You may as well face it.' (699)

There is racial profiling of criminality: "...before [Mr. Tanner] could get out a word, the [black] man was in his own apartment and had slammed the door. He had never known one to move that fast unless the police were after him" (689). And there is a twisted brand of loyalty mixed in with dislike of foreigners: "I suspect [Mrs. Shortley] said, "that before long there won't be no more niggers on this place. And I tell you what, I'd rather have niggers than them Poles.... I'll stand up for the niggers and that's that" ((298).

As Wood claims, humor does figure prominently and effectively in O'Connor's work, including one far less benign brand of humor which borders on bestiality. In "Flannery O'Connor's Radical Reality," Gerald analyzes her use of grotesque:

In addition to forming visual grotesques, O'Connor's visual descriptions of characters represent social types in a more general way. The eye of the beholder in these observations seems crucial to understanding **how visual perception and judgment occur simultaneously**.... while O'Connor's interest in distortion remains apparent and undeniable, her visual descriptions of characters are generally of social and physical types [that can include] 'a feature of the grotesque.... the confusion of a person with an object.' (37) [emphasis added]

Literary praxes of projecting animal qualities onto human subjects date back to antiquity, and are common figurations in the trope of the *iconismos* and *characterismos*. In "Physiognomy, Phrenology and the Temporality of the Body," Richard Twine, Senior Research Associate at Lancaster University, UK, writes, "It is open as to whether this process of animalization speaks of a supposed visual resemblance or is also intended to invoke the anthropomorphic character association of a particular animal" (70).

Animalization is featured in O'Connor's story, "Judgment Day." The tale recounts Tanner's migration from Georgia to his daughter's high-rise apartment in New York. The transition is troublesome for Tanner on several levels. He feels displaced, lonely, and useless as his daughter pursues her career. He is ill adept at dealing with the "niggers" next door—their high-class appearance and lack of deference. In reflecting on the life he left behind, he transposes animal qualities onto Southern blacks recalling how

He was known to have a way with niggers. There was an art to handling them. The secret of handling a nigger was to show him his brains didn't have a chance against yours. Then he would jump on your back and know he had a good thing for life. [He] had had Coleman on his back for thirty years. (*Collected* 681)

But his mishandling of one Southern black—Dr. Foley—explains his relocation: "You make a monkey out of one of them and he jumps on your back and stays there for life, but let one make a monkey out of you and all you can do is kill him or disappear" (684).

Although animalization is a common literary practice, it can also be perceived as culturally and racially tactless. O'Connor recognized there were different ethics and perceptions regarding such character portrayals, and that she could be held accountable for its use in her work. She writes in "The Fiction Writer and His Country," "In the greatest fiction, the writer's moral sense coincides with his dramatic sense, and I see no way for it to do this unless his moral judgment is part of the very act of seeing" (*Collected* 806). But it is the sense of place, or context, that O'Connor ultimately depends upon to justify her methods of characterization, writing in "Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction": "... I have found that anything that comes out of the South is going to be called grotesque by the Northern reader, unless it is grotesque, in which case it is going to be called realistic" (*Mystery* 40). And when questioned about her use of animal metaphors by her literary agent, Catherine Carver, O'Connor explained, "As for the 'on his back' business [in "Judgment Day"]—that's a cherished Southern white assertion—that the Negro is on his back and in a way it's quite true, but you have to be born below the M.D. [Mason-Dixon] line to appreciate it fully" (*Habit* 593).



Figure 24: "I'll Be a Monkey's Uncle," Kara Walker, 1996

Signifyin'— Cure for the Cure?

The tale of “The Signifying Monkey” has been recounted with wide variation in a genre of the black oral tradition called the “toast.” The eponymous monkey is a mythic mammal that is a mainstay in African American folklore. He is a trickster—an instigator— often used as an antagonistic catalyst to prod a protagonist into action and deeper characterization. The monkey uses humor, wit, irony, and “the profane” as guises to “spin” the truth, and for nonconfrontational critique. He serves as a venue, in essence, for the performance of “signifyin.’” The genre of signifying is a predecessor of “playing the dozens” as well as of the MC-boast or “brag” that is part of rap/hip hop culture (Hill 813). This taunting form of one-upmanship and comeuppance softens the blows in potentially painful interactions, as this version of the ballad reveals:

The Monkey and the Lion
Got to talking one day.
Monkey looked down and said, Lion,
I hear you’s king in every way.
But I know somebody
Who do not think that is true—
He told me he could whip
The living daylights out of you.
Lion said, Who?
Monkey said, Lion,
He talked about your mama
And talked about your grandma, too,
And I’m too polite to tell you
What he said about you. (815-16)

In *The Signifying Monkey*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. describes “signifyin(g)” as “repetition with a signal [black] difference.” According to him, it both mimics and departs from convention. He recognizes signifying as a form of “conscious articulation” and refers to it as “meta-discourse” (xxii). In addition to being useful for rhetorical invention, Gates advocates this paradigm as a site for interpretation. He sees no conflict between “truth” and representation, as the term articulation suggests. In his view, circularity makes the point just fine; his work emphasizes the value of circular rhetoric.

As well as being rooted in the African American tradition of circularity, or circumlocution, signifying is based in the canons of traditional rhetoric. As a rhetorical strategy for invention, *periphrasis*—or circumlocution—is a linguistic devolution or equivocation of a jokey nature. It can be useful for rounding off the edges of potentially unpleasant communications, as race-talk can certainly be. Signifying also shares some significant characteristics with the grotesque as a mode of comedic critique.

Perhaps the chief item in the repertoire of black manners is the art of ‘signifying’: the verbal device for taunting oppressive whites with false praise. What often appears as ‘tomming’—abject acquiescence to the whites—[as in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*] can be used to get revenge by indirection, to save oneself from returning evil for evil, and thus to preserve one’s own sense of dignity and worth when the white world has denied it. O’Connor had an especially keen ear for this black gift. (Wood 4)

It is in her letters and correspondences that O’Connor most clearly demonstrates her observations and considerations of signifying as a tactical approach to Southern race relations. For instance, on February 2, 1963, she wrote to “A”:

This has been one of our weeks of complications with [farmhand] Louise. The Negro’s method of escape is fool-proof. She can effect complete mental absence when she wants to—she’s there, grinning, agreeing, but gone gone. No white person can cope with this, not even my parent. Least of all my parent. (*Collected* 1178)

And during the next year, after a stay in an Atlanta hospital where, accompanied by her mother, she received a blood transfusion as part of her lupus treatment, she wrote again to “A,” “[We came home to] Louise bowing and scraping and carrying on about how much she had missed us” (*Habit* 587). In addition to viewing it as a “method of escape,” she also learns how the practice of signifying can be effected to equalize or subvert the power structures of the South. She writes to Sally and Robert Fitzgerald,

My Mamma had to get rid of her white help as Mr. F. was selling the milk out of the cans between here and Eatonton and proving himself in general more trouble than the cows. So there is nobody here but us and the niggers and everything is very peaceful...they are the only colored people around here with a white secretary and chauffer. (*Habit* 232)

Virtual Reality and Race

So what, if any, conclusions can be drawn? Is O'Connor's use of silhouette via grotesque distortion a form of racist profiling, or in fact racism's antidote? What are the ultimate roles of comedy in race? How does the euphemistic practice of signifying jibe with the grotesque? Are "distortion" and "signifying" two sides of the same rhetorical coin? Are they venues of mutual silhouette, or self-cancelling concepts? Wood writes, "We will have achieved racial sanity, I believe, when blacks and whites can joke together about our apprehensions and misapprehensions" (4). Yet humor has its limitations, as in the distinctions between laughing-with and laughing-at. When do jokes become hurtful stereotypes that reinforce rather than reconstruct existing power dynamics?

Humor definitely served O'Connor well in both her personal and professional life. But can the same be said for the subjects she represents, who may at various times be the objects of her amusement, or of her scorn? She writes in *Mystery and Manners*,

The South has to evolve a way of life in which the two races can live together with mutual forbearance. You don't form a committee to do this or pass a resolution: both races have to work it out the hard way. In parts of the South these new manners are evolving in a very satisfactory way, but good manners seldom make the papers. (234)

Good manners can be relative, and they sometimes do not make their way into O'Connor's papers either. In some instances, her humor serves to exacerbate white fear, guilt, and anxiety, rather than ameliorate it. Also, she sometimes fuels rather than calms the hurt and angry feelings of blacks who have experienced racism firsthand, and who feel that she can be articulately insensitive to their humanity. The last words remain to be spoken on race in the South. But here, O'Connor's is the swan song: "Anyway, it occurs to me to put forward that fiction writing is an exercise in charity except of course as one is expected to give the devil his due—something I have at least been scrupulous about.... You don't have to be good to write well. Much to be thankful for..." (*Habit* 103).

CHAPTER FOUR

KARA WALKER AND THE FORM OF THE CONTENT

Profiling the Silhouette

Art forms evolve until they reach their ultimate perfection, or until they reach some state of petrification, or until some new element is grafted on and a new art form made.

Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners*

You don't dream up a form and put the truth in it. The truth creates its own form. Form is necessity in the work of art. You know what you mean but you ain't got the right words for it.

Flannery O'Connor, *The Habit of Being*

[Kara Walker] uses pretty forms for content that hurts.

Phillipe Vergne

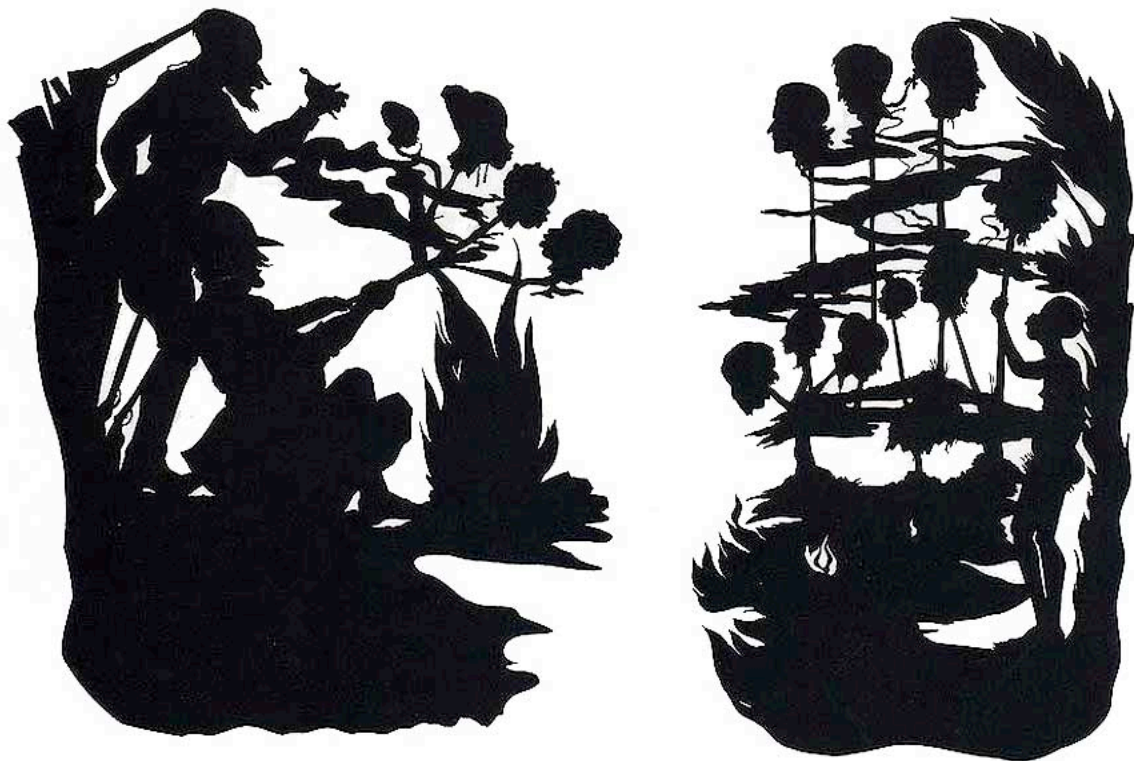


Figure 25: *Untitled (Hunting Scenes)*, Kara Walker, 2001

In America, silhouettes—in their traditional variety of black paper cutouts—were most popular from about 1790 to 1840. Auguste Edouart was one of the most famous of the American profilists. Although he began cutting profile portraits in England, and claimed in his *Treatise on Silhouette Likenesses* to have cut “more than 50,000 likenesses” before coming to America, during his ten-year career in this country, he is credited with cutting nearly 4,000 silhouettes. His *Silhouettes of Eminent Americans, 1839-1844* includes 347 of those cuttings, many believed to have been salvaged from his collected volumes of duplicates. *Eminent Americans*—“a veritable portrait gallery of distinguished Americans” (Oliver ix), includes four US presidents, five Supreme Court justices, six governors, eighteen mayors, six heads of colleges, fifteen authors, over two dozen physicians, thirteen generals, and sundry other military and government officials.

But distinguishing himself in the making of silhouettes proved to be no small feat. Edouart first drew his subjects in ink or “wash” on the white side of black paper. His hand-cut work is meticulous, including insertions of white paper into the cuttings to emphasize even the contrasts of shirt collars. Further, “In many instances, the black shade was also embellished with silver markings to show hair style, buttons, military braid, lapels, and the like” (Mayor, qtd. in Edouart viii). He mounted and pasted the cuttings on one of twenty-five different lithographed settings and backgrounds printed from metal or plane surfaces. These lithographed plates bore scenes of landscapes and other contextual milieu such as parlors, dining rooms, and work chambers. Further attention to detail made Edouart’s silhouettes special and unique. His cuttings were usually signed by both Edouart and his subjects, and often included biographical data: dates and place of birth and sittings. Added flourishes include shadows of subjects; and in several of the silhouettes, subjects hold objects that bear legible clues to their vocations. Newsprint clippings of death notices sometimes appear.



Figure 26: Edouart Silhouette, *Frank Johnson, Leader of the Band, 1842-44*



Figure 27: Edouart Silhouette, *Louis-Joseph Papineau, 1840*

Although the invention of the camera presaged the end of the silhouette as a widespread form of portraiture, the technique was taken up and carried on mainly by the Arts and Crafts Movement in early American history. Today, the popularity of silhouettes is re-emerging in a new generation of fans who appreciate the form as nostalgic and unique. The feature of its own community association, the Guild of American Papercutters (GAP)—an international organization made up of both cutters and collectors—the silhouette remains popular as folk art.

Hilton Als, writing in the *New Yorker*, calls the silhouette “a sentimental form” (75), but that characterization belies what Als has come to understand of how it is being put to use by at least one artist: Kara Elizabeth Walker (1969-current). Notwithstanding Walker’s own attempts to dismiss the form’s import—“My work is really abject and self-effacing sometimes. I mean, it’s big and overwrought, but it’s just paper dolls, and it’s kind of silly. I think that that might actually be a luxury that previous generations couldn’t afford” (5)—she has become the most (in)famous silhouettist of all time. Her treatment of the form has eclipsed the works of artists she is compared to: Haiti’s Hector Hyppolite, Netherland’s Hieronymous Bosch, and the French painter Honore’ Daumier.

Wise beyond her years, Walker stands firmly in the tradition of the scribe—or more pointedly, the African griot—an historian, a storyteller. Her silhouettes reflect psychic evolutions in race and race relations, chronicling the intricate twists and turns, the nuanced dance, as it were, which has been and continues to be performed between blacks and whites. Her art is visually graphic and aesthetically poignant. It lingers between shock and recognition. In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes illustrates the principal of *punctum*, the power of visual images to pierce, or tap deeply into the emotions. Walker’s work summons a Barthesian “That’s it!”—a personal identification which registers loudly on the pain, pleasure, revulsion, attraction, degradation, and elevation scale.

Walker's work also carries social and political punctum. Like Daumier, Walker is a commentator who puts politics to the service of art. Like Edouart, Daumier was a prolific artist. As a draftsman, he is credited with producing over 4,000 lithographs. Much of his later work involved political satire in which he ridiculed French bourgeois society. In 1832, Daumier was imprisoned for *Gargantua*, arguably his best-known work, a caricature of King Louis Phillipe. As Forgione indicates, the effect of the silhouette "can tend toward realism or toward caricature" (491). Walker, unlike Daumier, is engaged in a process of "shifting the axis of the work away from satire and toward the realm of social realism," according to Als (7). Walker's uses of silhouette are geared towards meeting the aims of that artistic movement, social realism—that reacts against romanticism and defies facile understandings of beauty and goodness—rather than the more comedic aspects that Daumier exploits.



Figure 28: Lithograph, *Gargantua*, Honoré Daumier, 1831

Social realists seek to expose the hard facts of life, often championing the causes of society's underdogs: the oppressed, or the poverty-stricken. Walker's works with silhouette have taken up such matters, among others. Treatment of black women in slavery and the antebellum South is a prevalent topic in Walker's art, a theme that has ignited a firestorm of activity by Walker, and an equal or greater maelstrom of scrutiny by critics and admirers. "'One of the interesting reversals of cultural prejudice' is how Walker has described the physical, mental, and emotional degradation of black women in white patriarchal society," Als writes. Countering that reversal is now her *raison d'être*.

Countering reversals is an apt metaphor for the process, product, and propositions involved in creating silhouettes. By operating as mirror images of forms, both reflection and self-reflexivity come into play. The shadow element of silhouette illustrates that its seeming simplicity is deceptive. It is a topos that houses various levels of signification: representing lightness and darkness, void and substance, and, for Walker, the complexity of relations between black and white Americans. She writes:

I had a catharsis looking at early American varieties of silhouette cuttings. What I recognized, besides narrative and historicity and racism, was this very physical displacement: the paradox of removing a form from a blank surface that in turn creates a black hole. I was struck by the irony of so many of my concerns being addressed: blank/black, hole/whole, shadow/substance, etc. (qtd. in Als 75)

Whiteness and blackness function in Walker's work not—as they do in O'Connor's corpus, and not as they do within American mythology—as psychic reservoirs for good and evil, purity and depravity, or yin and yang. Rather, although she is fluent in the idioms of the polar extremes, Walker seeks a central locus to represent the truths therein:

"The silhouette says a lot with very little information, but that's also what the stereotype does," Walker has written. "So I saw the silhouette and the stereotype as linked. Of course, while the stereotype, or the emblem, can communicate with a lot of people, and a lot of people can understand it, the other side is that it also reduces differences, reduces diversity to that stereotype."
http://www.oswego.edu/news/index.php/site/news_story/expressive_silhouettes

Birth of a Nationalist

Walker was born in Stockton, California, into an educated, artistic, and solidly middle-class family, just as the dust clouds of the Civil Rights storm were starting to settle. As she recalls her childhood in the 1970's, Walker was insulated from much racial turmoil. "I was actually born with a vaguely positive worldview. There was something kind of triumphant that I didn't know what had been accomplished [in the Civil Rights movement]. In some ways, I grew up declawed. Declawed and unprepared" (Walker, qtd. in Belcove 2). It was not until her older brother convinced her father, an art professor and practicing artist, about the virtues of the "New South" and her family relocated to Georgia, that she began to peer into racism's ugly face.

It was the small things Walker experienced in Stone Mountain that introduced her to the racial hostilities between Southern blacks and whites. For example,

...when the family moved to Georgia when she was 13, Walker says... "'nigger' sort of became a way of life." Accustomed to hanging out with kids of all races, she initially did the same at her new school. Then, while waiting at a bus stop with some white friends one day, she was taken aback to hear them using the slur to describe other classmates—and then to remark about Walker in a creepily complimentary way: "Oh, she's not a nigger. She's just like us." Says Walker, "I remember distancing myself on that day from that group." (Belcove 3)

She was also disillusioned by her observations that her father, who had been revered as an educator in California, was treated with condescension and veiled disdain in Georgia. As an impressionable teenager, it was hard for Walker to watch as her father's proud, dignified countenance shriveled under the strains of such mistreatment.

Still, Walker's racial consciousness was not fully awakened until years later when, as a student at the Art College of Atlanta (ACA), she overheard a conversation among a group of black students. Walker was inspired by the righteous tone and conviction they expressed. Something in that conversation spurred Walker to tap into her latent black identity. That was the start of it, and the rest—as they say—is history.

Walker's racial coming-of-age is particularly fascinating, not merely because of the remarkable art which it has spawned, but also in the psycho-sociological process which it foretells. *Nigrescence*—"becoming black"—is a name for the development of black identity. This term aptly describes Walker's psychic metamorphosis. Herbert W. Harris writes about this process in *Racial and Ethnic Identity: Psychological Development and Creative Expression*. According to Harris, there are at least five fairly distinct stages involved in the process of *nigrescence*. The first of these he calls the "pre-encounter," a stage of pre-consciousness, in which the individual has no real sense of, or value for, blackness. Harris calls stage two "the encounter," and says it refers to a defining, sometimes deeply emotional, individual experience. The third step, "immersion-emersion," marks an awakening to racial consciousness. During that stage, the individual seeks out knowledge about the race and develops (or deepens) racial pride. The fourth step, according to Harris, is "internalization," in which the individual settles into black subjectivity. And lastly is the stage of "internalization-commitment," which occurs when the black subject dedicates him/herself to black citizenship and experiences racial kinship for perhaps the first time.

While Harris' views on *nigrescence* have to do with the development of individual race consciousness, a similar process could be charted with the African-American race as a whole. The first three steps refer to the diaspora—the Middle Passage through U.S. citizenship. The latter part of the 19th century and its turn into the 20th mark the Harlem Renaissance and what the philosopher, Alain Locke, has called the period of "the New Negro." The art of that time reflects an internalization of what it means to be a black American and to wrestle with the "double consciousness" W.E.B. DuBois described. The second Black Arts Movement saw a more restless and radical cast of characters: Sonia Sanchez, Amiri Baraka, and Haki Madhubuti.

Probably the most significant characteristic of *nigrescence* is its emphasis on blackness as cultural marker. As such, there is less reliance upon African heritage for identity, and more attention paid to full and unmitigated franchisement as Americans who just happen to be black. Once this movement took hold, even the most mild-mannered blacks, those who had once been content with being called “colored,” Negro, (or any other variations on that term) picked up the mantle of blackness and donned it with great pride. And they were emboldened in this by the great strides being made in the Civil Rights Movement, and the confidence and dignity of its leadership: Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and Kwame Ture (formerly Stokely Carmichael, father of the “Black Power” movement), among others. The Afro, the dashiki, and the raised, tightly closed fist became commonplace images to reflect that new racial solidarity.

Whereas Harris’s process of *nigrescence* is potentially recurring— an individual can work back and forth through the steps— as a race, there has been no turning back to racial deference or self-restraint. A popular saying humorously conveys this conviction: “Once you go black, you never go back.” And this is a startling rebuttal to the old Jim Crow ditty: “If you’re white, you’re right. If you’re brown, stick around. But if you’re black, step back.” There would be no more “stepping back” for black Americans. And not for Walker either. While struggling to incorporate her new racial consciousness into traditional oil painting, she found herself taking refuge in the silhouette, which offered a venue for her new racial expressions. Her epiphany, she explains, came in

a huge moment at the Rhode Island School of Design. I'd been looking at a lot of early American art, thinking about self-definition, what it was for a group to define itself against, say, Europe. Silhouettes kept coming up, but didn't make sense until I brought in thoughts about black self-image, the performance of blackness, gender, masking, passing, pretending, physiognomy, and race sciences.... Just the profile, and the idea of gleaning so much information from a detail. It also came from the direction of art making, and the recognition that I wasn't going to make paintings.

(http://www.boston.com/news/globe/ideas/articles/2006/04/02/qa_with_kara_walker/)

Double, Double: Toil and Trouble

Walker, the youngest MacArthur “genius” award winner in 1997 at the age of 28, earned early international recognition and acclaim for her skill in the technique of the silhouette. Yet, the ordeal of her artistic evolution has been complicated—even tortuous. Between leaving ACA and Atlanta and heading for the MFA Program at the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence, Walker embarked upon a period of hedonism. She read romance novels voraciously and conducted what she called “experiments.” She entered into a mostly sexual liaison with a white man she herself describes as “a sadist, a racist, a misogynist...and perhaps less credibly: Satan himself” (qtd in Als 74).

Her self-imposed period of degradation—for which her sexual partner served as conduit—led to a corresponding mental collapse for Walker, as well as an artistic rebirth. She says she had a “schizoid reaction” to her entanglement with the man: “I was to him an ‘enigma’ and there was no love lost.” Still, despite the costs to her emotional welfare—“being objectified, being an object of white male desire”—Walker insists these ‘experiments’ were necessary to lead her to her true purpose as a cutter. She declares, “Without hitting a couple of dark milestones in my sense of self, I wouldn’t have started making the silhouettes,” (74) and thus her trials and errors paid off.

Shortly after, Walker took up a different type of experiment that helped solidify her burgeoning process of *nigrescence*. She began reading a canon of black feminist prose by writers like bell hooks, Toni Morrison, Michele Wallace, and the sci-fi writer, Octavia Butler. Those works were instrumental in helping Walker carve out definition for her own black womanhood. She told interviewer Als, “Maybe early on, if I’d had sort of a critical input from black women in my life or a less silent black family, I wouldn’t have been so curious [as to allow herself to be objectified]” (75). Her introspection steered her moreso away from painting and towards a theoretical art.

Walker had earlier been exposed to one of the most renowned contemporary black female artists, Adrian Piper—a conceptual artist who had often been mistaken for white and whose works reflect a disquieted, aggressive racial composure [Figure 29]. Walker decided to take a different approach to her own art, even writing a rebuke of Piper, which she later attributed to revealing “something of my inhibitions...about making any kind of racialized gesture in my work.” As Walker explained to Als, her perspective on making art at that time was, “I’m not going to ghettoize. You have ‘real’ art, and then the art of the ethnic minority” (73). Walker was at that time certain of only one thing— that she wanted to be an artist who made ‘real’ art, as she then defined it.

But that view changed once Walker began exploring in earnest a more black feminist tack on art. Around that time, Walker was delving into the works of Lorna Simpson—a mixed-race artist whose works feature black female hair culture; Betye Saar—whose works ex- and re-appropriate the Aunt Jemima trope; and Ellen Gallagher—who explores black beauty and body image. Such works, Walker later claimed, started an intrusion, then an attack, on her ‘universalist’ approach to art.

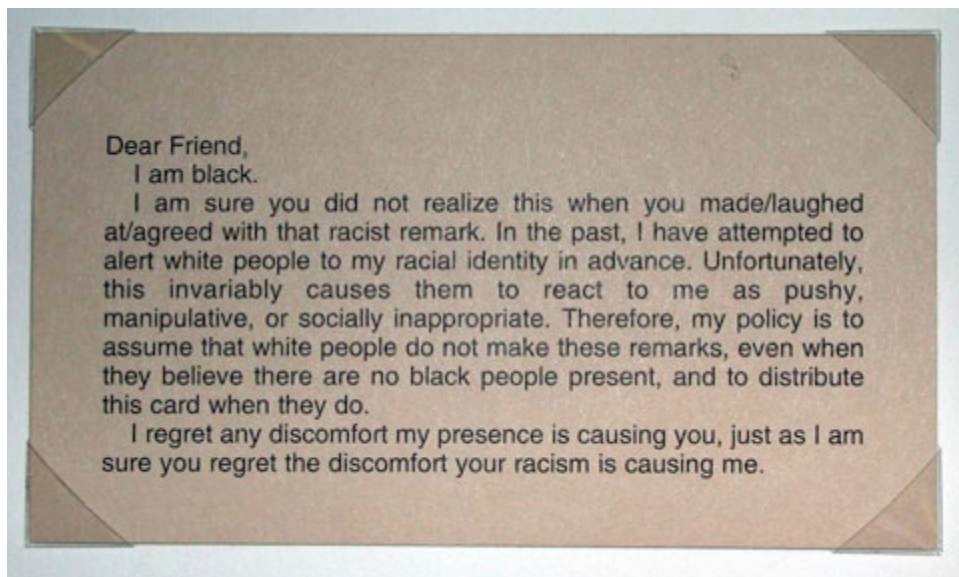


Figure 29: Adrian Piper, *Calling Card*, Undated

Being open to a different set of influences set Walker on a path toward carving out her own niche. Early on in her career, one particular image captured Walker's artistic imagination: a 19th century silhouette of a black female slave in profile. The drawing known as *Flora* is reported to be of a young woman who was sold as a slave in Connecticut in 1796, 12 years after that state had voted for gradual manumission.

According to a bill of sale dated 1796, Asa Benjamin, of Stratford in Fairfield County, purchased a nineteen year old slave named Flora from Margaret Dwight of Milford in New Haven County, for the sum of twenty-five pounds sterling. Accompanying the bill of sale was a silhouette, drawn on a 14x13-inch piece of cut-paper and colored with brown ink by an unknown and probably untrained artist. The silhouette was likely traced from a candle shadow and then filled in, and may have been sketched specifically for this transaction. According to the Benjamins' records, Flora died on August 31, 1815. (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part2/2h69.html>)



Figure 30: *Flora*, Image Credit: Stratford Historical Society, Stratford, CT

A Prototype of Black Femininity

The image and bits of the narrative of *Flora* are consistent counterparts with Misener's concept of the *iconism*: "The modern parallels, the advertisements of escaped prisoners and criminals attach similar iconistic descriptions to their photographs" (102). In *Seeing the Unspeakable: The Art of Kara Walker*, Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw makes an observation that can connect the silhouette of Flora with the *iconistic* tradition:

Like a photographic mug shot used by contemporary police, or like an FBI Most Wanted poster, Flora's silhouette seems to have been part of the documentation that her owner kept on his purchase for identification purposes in case she ever ran away.

In elaborating on the significance of the image, she states,

Of the dozen or so silhouettes of this type that survive from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the haunting pencil drawing known as *Flora* is perhaps the most enigmatic and suggestive of the brutality of slavery and the blank darkness that the black body inhabited within such an expressive system. (22)

Shaw's Stanford University doctoral dissertation in Art and Art History was an iconographic analysis of Walker's silhouettes, a version of which was published in 2004 as *Seeing*. In preparing her monograph, Shaw visited numerous Walker exhibitions, read many of her interviews, and interviewed and corresponded with Walker herself. In addition, coming from an Art History background, Shaw is steeped in the conventions and vernacular of the field. As such, she notes the irony in the likeness of Flora's image to the shape of a pressed flower, or *flora*. She notes its verbal and visual suggestion of the potential de-flowering of black female slaves, a prominent Walker theme.

Furthermore, Shaw believes that Flora's history likely inspired the representation of "the Negress," the central character in Walker's art. A shadow image of generic black womanhood, the figure of the Negress is neither novel nor unique to Walker. It had been explored, for example, by some of the very same black female artists who were shaping Walker's feminine consciousness, such as Betye Saar and Ellen Gallagher.

One of Saar's most famous works, *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima*, depicts that onetime paragon of black maternity—a figure sometimes parodied by deciphering the syllables: “Ain’t yo’ mama”—in a new renegade stature. Saar’s work depicts Aunt Jemima, who formerly represented the black nanny or wet-nurse, a surrogate mother figure on the slave plantation, as an empowered gun-toting vigilante run amok [Figure 31]. Similarly, Ellen Gallagher uses cut-paper techniques to transpose black female images in exploring her own identity and placing that identity within the context of the African diaspora. Her series called the *Watery ecstatic*—which displays an underwater world populated by West African women who had been forced off of slave ships during the Middle Passage of the Mid-Atlantic slave trade—features an oceanic Negress figure.



Figure 31: *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima*, Betye Saar, 1972

And on other artistic fronts, Walker's *Negress* can draw on seemingly less-organic representations of the black feminine. For instance, Constantin Brancusi's 1926 abstract sculpture, *La Nègresse blond* (*The Blonde Negress*), is one conceivable reference point for Walker's work [Figure 32]. And, as a more pointed example, "the extraordinary paper cutouts" of the French painter and collagist, Henri Matisse, according to Donald Stone in "The Achievement of Matisse," (155) foreshadow Walker's own use of the figure in black paper cutouts. Stone points out that the work of Matisse was on display in the 1910 Roger Fry exhibition of which Virginia Woolf observed that "human character" was changing. He quotes a Russian admirer of Matisse, who notes,

Objects rendered by Matisse—whether it is a tablecloth, a vase or, in exactly the same way, a human face—are dematerialized, transformed into coloured silhouettes, distillations of colour that spill in ornamental streaks and splashes over the canvas. Not things but the essence of things. (154-5)

La Nègresse, the 1952 *gouache decoupee* work of Matisse [Figure 33] was inspired by the black American *danseuse*, Josephine Baker, a controversial subject Walker also references.



**Figure 32: Constantin Brancusi,
La Nègresse Blond, 1926**



Figure 33: Henri Matisse, *La Nègresse*, 1952

In addition, a Joan Miro painting presents a graphic Negresse image [Figure 34]. Miro, an early 20th century Spanish-born artist, shares some common themes with Walker, such as an interest in expressionist portraiture—characterized by a sense of angst, a rejection of naturalism, and a desire to affect viewers emotionally. A loosely structured movement, expressionism encompasses the plastic arts, music, and dance. It has been connected with the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche in his *Birth of Tragedy*, with the synchronism of the Greek Apollonian and Dionysian aesthetics. It can be seen in the works of Kandinsky, Munch, and Van Gogh, and in the African arts. The term was coined by Czech art historian Antonín Matějček in 1910 to oppose impressionism:

An Expressionist wishes, above all, to express himself... (an Expressionist rejects) immediate perception and builds on more complex psychic structures... Impressions and mental images that pass through people's souls as through a filter which rids them of all substantial accretions to produce their clear essence are assimilated and condensed into more general forms, into types, which he transcribes through simple short-hand formulae and symbols. (qtd. in D. Gordon 175)



Figure 34: Joan Miro, *A Star Caresses the Breast of a Negress (Painting Poem)*, 1938

The Negress, a trickster—an indeterminate archetype—is a central metaphor in many of Walker's works. As Als points out, this figure is one who occupies the syncretic space of "heroine—or villain" of the narrative Walker is weaving (75). According to Walker, "There's a place in contemporary American culture for African-American female truth telling. To tell it like it is or to tell it like it isn't or to tell it like you dreamed it up" (qtd. in Belcove 4). The Negress is a viable venue for the ambivalent role Walker assigns to black women who, despite being physically and emotionally violated during slavery, as two examples of their subjection, reject the mantle of victimization. The Negress is Walker's vehicle for reconfiguring an artistic form used to type and stereotype the black American female—a 'master' trope turned back on the master.

When, in *The Signifying Monkey*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. refers to the act of narrative articulation he calls "signifying," he explains that it has been a longstanding practice in the African American literary tradition. Although mimetic in nature, in practice signifying allows for critical representation and commentary. Thus, "Gates is careful to emphasize that the process of reinterpretation, which we see in Walker's work, is essential to a postmodern African American artistic practice" (Shaw 36).

Reinterpretation is Walker's approach to the history of slavery, and its mythos. Her silhouette panoramas are rife with images of mammies and pickaninnies—stereotypical portrayals of Blacks—figures that appear more aligned with racism than critical of it. And Walker has certainly been the object of those charges. Yet drawing upon, and subverting such stereotypes, Walker uses her visual rhetorics to transpose the images, to defy victimization and highlight the flawed humanity of all parties involved, and to complicate rote notions of good and evil. "Credited with the ability to externalize the intrinsic essence of things, shadow and silhouette constituted a crucial pictorial strategy for making visible the artist's apprehension of the internal" (Forgione 493).

Cutting to the Chase



Figure 35: *For the Benefit of All Races of Mankind (Mos Specially the Master One, Boss)*
An Exhibition of Artifacts, Remnants, and Effluvia EXCAVATED
from the Black Heart of a Negress VII, Kara Walker, 2002

With the silhouette as her primary medium, Walker produces art with an agenda. Her Negress—her re-interpretation of the “sentimental form” of silhouette—is a composite of characters like Little Eva and Topsy from what has been called the “sentimental novel” of Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. The categorization of Stowe’s novel as “sentimental,” as with mischaracterizations of Walker’s work, is an understatement. In its depiction of the horrors of slavery, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is credited with hastening the Civil War and contributing to the abolition of the peculiar institution. Tony Horowitz has said *Cabin* has “done more to keep the Civil War alive, and to mold its memory, than any history book or event since Appomattox” (qtd. in English 110). History will reveal the impact of Walker’s work in realigning more recent race relations.

Yet, also similar to Walker's use of silhouette, Stowe's method of inciting such strong reactions was controversial. For example, in describing Topsy, Stowe writes:

She was one of the blackest of her race...Her mouth...displayed a white and brilliant set of teeth. Her wooly hair was in sundry little tails, which stuck out in every direction. The expression of her face was an odd mixture of shrewdness and cunning.... She was dressed in a single filthy, ragged garment, made of bagging.... Altogether, there was something odd and goblin-like about her appearance—something...“so heathenish,” as to inspire [Miss Ophelia] with utter dismay... (Chapter XX).

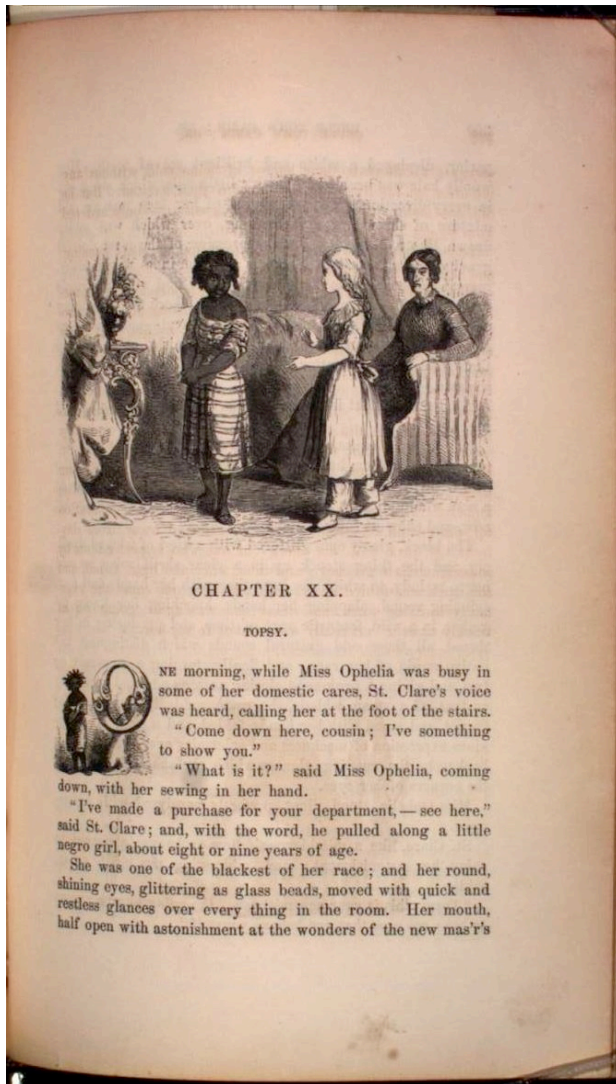


Figure 36: Topsy, in a Scene from Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 1852



Figure 37: *Topsy*, Ink etching by Kara Walker, c1995

Even aside from the visual similarities, there are other connections between Walker's *Negress* and Stowe's *Topsy*. As one example, Walker uses the very name "Topsy" interchangeably to identify the main character in her silhouettes, which are

like little walking fables. I'm externalizing what can't be expressed verbally. I'm thinking of the little girl holding her tail, but each figure is unreal or hybrid to begin with, so to call this one a shadow or pickaninny or Topsy... is she a real character? Is she an externalization of a part of me? There are so many fallacies, so many myths about the absence of humanity in women, in blacks, that I don't even think it's abnormal that she has a tail. (qtd. in Harvey)

Like *Topsy*, Walker's *Negress* is myth made manifest in visual form, a specter of herself.



Figure 38: *Untitled*, Kara Walker, 1996

Such stereotypical portrayals of blacks appear to align with racism, rather than divert from it; and like Stowe, Walker risks that charge for the potential gain. Stowe's verbal portrayal of Topsy finds easy racial rhetorical resonance with Walker's visual depictions of the Negress in silhouettes like her 1997 *Slavery! Slavery!* [Figures 39, 40]. There the Negress, with her trademark braided hair, appears as agitator, seemingly celebrating the pending demise of a white child in the mammy's care. Signifying more on the images, Walker simulates a voodoo dance, adding further menace to the scene.



Figure 39: *Slavery! Slavery! Presenting a GRAND and LIFELIKE Panoramic Journey into Picturesque Southern Slavery or "Life at 'Ol' Virginny's Hole" (sketches from Plantation Life)."* See the Peculiar Institution as never before! All cut from black paper by the able hand of Kara Elizabeth Walker, an Emancipated Negress and leader in her Cause, Kara Walker, 1997.



Figure 40: Excerpt of the Negress from Walker's *Slavery! Slavery!* 1997

The incorporation of familiar tropes and images in Walker's tableaux serves as touchstones for viewing. But there is no comfort in Walker's version of the familiar—or in her unfamiliar either. As scenery, her silhouettes use “as their backdrop one of America's ugliest or, depending on who one asks, most glorious: the antebellum South” (Janus 139). In its social realism, her art possesses “a documentary dimension” and is “a *credible* record of that period. Her silhouette sequences are a visual parallel to a popular literary genre of that era: the slave narratives [such as Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 1861]” (Moshenson 55). Walker's silhouettes are repositories of the myth and lore of slave era racial rhetoric. “In terms of both form and content they link back to the literary genre of the 19th century slave stories, characterized by narrative units that can be combined and extended at will” (Ackerman 71). But no resting on laurels!

On the contrary, her uses of subversive images—such as slavemasters who are represented as sexually and otherwise subservient to their slaves, or female slaves who appear to relish their own sexual exploitation—destabilize viewers, operating as racial catalysts, prompting reevaluation of conditioned responses to race. Darby English says:

[*Slavery! Slavery!*] is only quasi-pictorial, even before one tries to account for its insistently discontinuous figural arrangements. A mistress shakes a headless child upside down; a small black boy, dressed in Turkish garb, follows a white prostitute with an atomizer, blowing perfume up her skirts; a little boy is held aloft by and appears to fellate an older white man's gun-shaped hand; a baby is birthed from a watermelon-sized egg; a young interracial couple have sex on the roof of the slaves' quarters; and so on. (92)

In addition, Walker draws for inspiration on other antebellum literary genres and sources than the slave narrative, most notably, as she acknowledges, the romance novel:

[The silhouette is]... a near perfect solution to a complex project that I set for myself...to try and uncover the often subtle and uncomfortable ways racism, and racist and sexist stereotypes influence and script our everyday lives. This “scripting” was especially pronounced in the American South, where I grew up, where a longing for a romanticized and homogenized “past” lingers and retains all of its former power in the form of dubious arts—Romance novels, pornographic fantasies, cartoons, antique postcards and collectible figurines. (Walker, qtd. in Obrist)

Herstory

Walker's silhouettes are immersed in narrative rhetoric, to the point that her silhouettes not only draw from the genre, but also embody it. This is all to the good, as Walker feels strongly about the importance of storytelling, remarking in a *Bomb Magazine* interview with Mattea Harvey that "narratives are forever." Her *Negress* is a strong lead character, and she creates an equally strong supporting cast. Her visual tales—her race-scapes—are situated in mythic and bucolic antebellum settings that provide a distant, historical context, although their content is visceral, relevant, and current. "I don't think of these works as living in the past," Walker tells *Boston Globe* interviewer Harvey Blume, "They're responding to right now. I haven't felt the need to hip-hopify anything," she states. "How is this not up to date?" she rhetorically questions Blume, pointing to her own art. Working with historical images does not limit Walker to historical specificity, but comports with the silhouette's potential for providing rhetorical shortcuts which the artist can then capitalize and innovate upon.



Figure 41: Walker's *Gone: An Historical Romance of Civil War As it Occurred Between the Dusky Thighs of Young Negress and Her Heart*, 1994

True to its *manirhetorical* form, the silhouette represents a seemingly finite linguistic system—a meta-code—with possibilities for infinite readings. English writes,

...Walker's are *visual* enunciations that exist—to be realized as such upon their uptake by viewers. In themselves, they refer in an open-ended way to lives, stereotypes, times, and places that originate and expand.... [Her] tableaux come to be regarded as a shorthand for the means by which art becomes meaning, becomes culture. (124-5)

In addition, like O'Connor, Walker's adaptations of racial profiling in her art place the multimodal aspects of the silhouette on display. According to exhibition notes at the Walker Art Center, which houses one of her latest shows—*My Complement, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love*—Walker describes her own work as “both visual and literary.”

Literature such as southern romance novels, historical fiction, slave narratives, and contemporary novels influence the artist's practice of storytelling, while some texts are directly referenced in her pieces. Like a novelist, Walker employs characters, setting and action to convey a story. These narratives are not always linear, however, and don't necessarily include a clear plot line. In the artist's words, “There is always a beginning and there's never a conclusion.” Walker is interested in the stories we tell about ourselves, and specifically, a desire for a narrative about “African America” that engages the past, present, and future.

It is not everyday that an artist can improve upon an existing form or medium, particularly one—like the silhouette—that has, as O'Connor suggests, “petrified.” The fact that her work is both grounded in history and at the same time imaginary is part of the reason Walker has caused such a stir in the world of art and culture. Explaining the attraction that the old-fashioned form of the romance novel holds for her—much like her attraction to the silhouette—Walker remarks to Tommy Lott, “There was an earlier moment, once upon a time before this work was realized, that the idea of the historical romance fascinated me. Mainly because it is a quasi-literary form which is geared toward women and which uses history as a foil for self-deception and simple seduction” (qtd. at <http://learn.walkerart.org/karawalker/Main/Narrative>). Thus, Walker's narrative messages are so ‘cutting edge’ not least of all because they are characterized by an infatuation with the genres, legends, and lore of the Old South.

Sticks and Stones?

Although visual rhetorics are Walker's primary medium, she is equally versed in the use of text as race rhetoric. For instance, as well as suggesting with images, Walker uses verbal signifiers to mimic and pun upon the traditions of original silhouette naming. One vivid case of this is the subtitling of her exhibitions, such as "*All Cut from Black Paper by the Able Hand of Kara Elizabeth Walker, an Emancipated Negress Leader in Her Cause,*" in "*Slavery! Slavery! Slavery!*" There, she announces that artistic freedom is vital to her status as a self-proclaimed race leader. She explains, "They're [the titles] the sideshow act.... The title has its own agenda, which sometime runs counter to the rage in the piece. It can be a queasy invitation to this uncomfortable space" (qtd. in Blume).

Walker's use of text within/in lieu of her silhouettes frames her counterdiscourse to white dominant culture, in short. That practice reflects her influences of *nigrescence* in incorporating the language of resistance into artistic form. Walker uses her words, like her images, to compose what Als calls "an antidote to politeness" (72). Hamza Walker concurs with Als' characterization of the strength of her rhetoric, claiming, "Walker doesn't pussy-foot her subject matter, to say the least" (*Witness* 277). Walker's use of text underscores the perverse and dysfunctional aspects of black/white relations, as witnessed in her *Letter from a Black Girl* [Figure 42]. Such uses of dialogue highlight and emulate the ethos of silhouette as a method of *under-drawing* that *over-signifies*. It also suggests that scholars of rhetorics co-sign Morrison's injunction to literary scholars to examine "the alliance between visually rendered ideas and linguistic utterances" (49).

True, This! —Beneath the rule of men entirely great,
The pen is mightier than the sword. Behold
The arch-enchanters wand! — itself a nothing! —
But taking sorcery from the master-hand
To paralyse the Cæsars, and to strike
The loud earth breathless! — Take away the sword —
States can be saved without it!

Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *Richelieu; or the Conspiracy*

Riddle: What do Euripides, the Apostle Paul, Thomas Jefferson, and Tupac Shakur have in common? **Answer:** They have all variously espoused a variation on the metonymic adage, “The pen is mightier than the sword.” Walker, too, now reserves her violent impulses for her art—and not masochistic relationships. She admits it is a struggle to contain the animus her new racial consciousness has spurned. She tells interviewer Als:

I must escape, go wild, be free, after which I have to confront the questions: How free? How wild? How much further must I go to escape all I’ve internalized? I have a big fear of losing control, or losing control in ways that I can’t control. A studio, or just a sketchbook, has always been the place where I could do that, but it was confined and finite. (75, 73)

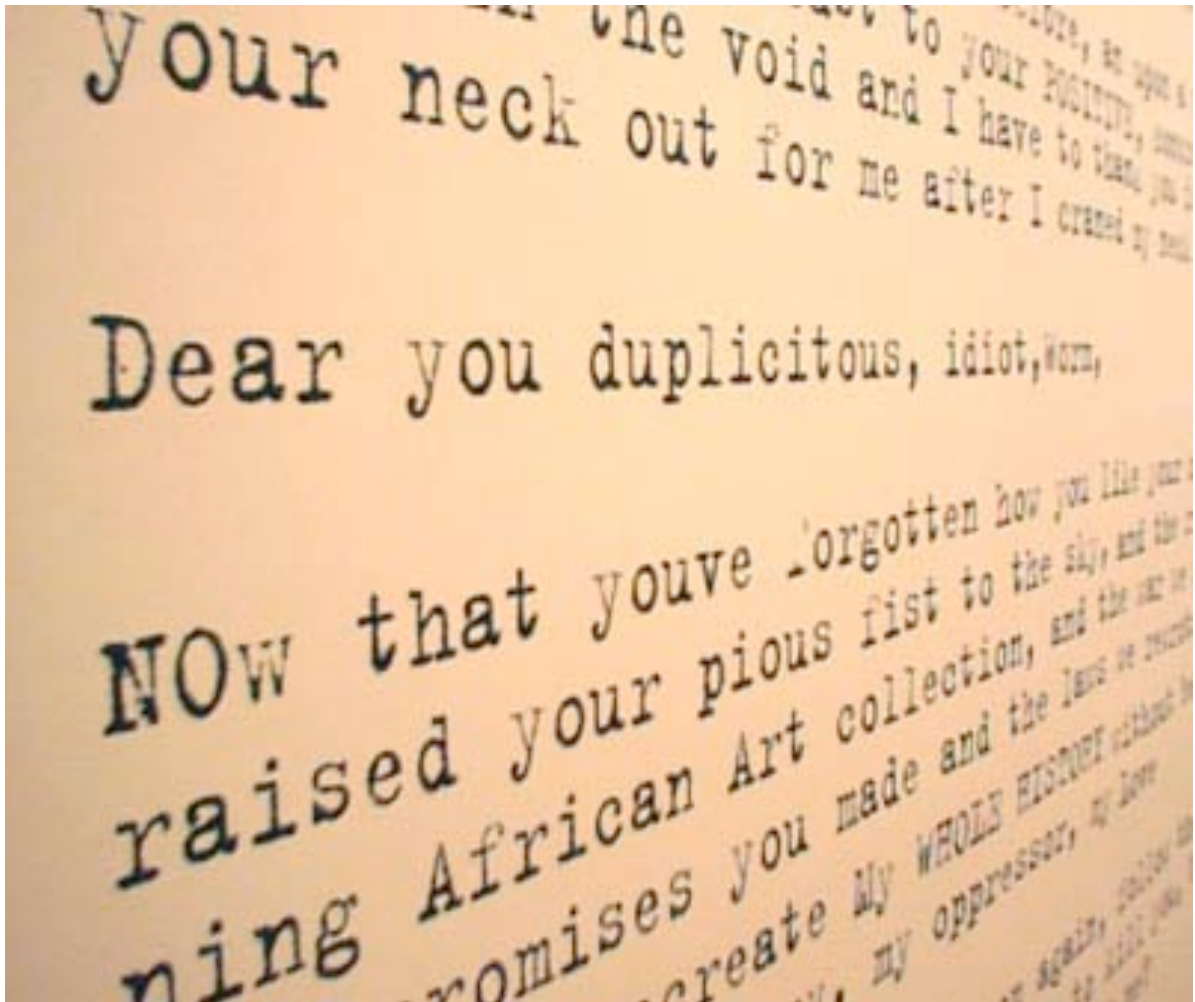


Figure 42: Walker’s Installation, *Letter from a Black Girl*, 1998

In recognizing her work with silhouette as involving both visual and verbal dimensions, Walker is also cognizant of a need to balance those aspects to maximize the impact of her work. She has been influenced by the “calling cards” of Piper [Figure 43] in composing her own series of note cards. But whereas Piper’s cards were printed and distributed as part of her performance art—her acts of “social radicalism”—and functioned independently of any visual art component or formal venue, Walker’s words are designed for display as part of her exhibitions. For instance, of her 1996 show on *American Primitives*, Walker explains to *Bomb* interviewer Mattea Harvey:

One of the pieces or situations that I was happiest with was when, over a couple of months, I sat and typed on note cards in the hopes of something arriving or making sense. Another month went by and I realized that I really needed some images. I thought I would try to use the note cards as a springboard for the images, although there was no one-to-one relation.



Figure 43: Adrian Piper, *Self-Portrait*, 1981

At the same time that Walker values her ability to articulate her truth visually — “I put a fair amount of trust in my visual ‘speaking’ voice”—she utilizes text to paint pictures as well. For Walker, her art is both a means of expression and a means of containment. It keeps her rage from seething to eruption. Yet even with this, she wishes the words were not so necessary. Moreover, the anger she throws out can bounce back:

Sometimes I get mad at myself when I write on top of the drawing because it seems like a giveaway. They might come off as too instructive, even if it’s written in the same spirit as a typed piece or a title. In my thinking, the word is a completely separate thing... (qtd in Harvey)

Ashley Doane offers much to an understanding of Walker’s *modus operandi* when he draws associations between racial politics and rhetoric. He writes, “Throughout US history, challenges to white supremacy have been met by countermobilization” (258). He provides a context for Walker’s position as a member of at least two of what he calls “subordinate groups” that may have a “lesser (or even deliberately restricted) ability to influence public discourse,” but which “can nevertheless create ‘counterdiscourses’ ... in an attempt to challenge existing racial structures” (256-57). These counterdiscourses act as systems of checks and balances to offset normative public communications that are often experienced as disempowering by the subordinate groups he describes.

Like Doane, Darby English offers a perspective on resistance-rhetoric. In *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness*, he explains that even though “black art is not something that was always there waiting to be made or discovered,” there is a sense in which the genre is an inherent outgrowth of institutional racism. A “comparably significant reason for black art’s necessity is different and more specific than systematic racism, and results from the overdetermination of some important *countermeasures* against racism and other means of withholding and distorting representation” (8). For English, as with Doane, and with Walker herself, words and images are forms of action.

The Form of Content

The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled. The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe.... We only see what we look at. To look is an act of choice.... although every image embodies a way of seeing, our perception or appreciation of an image depends also upon our way of seeing.

John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*

The phrase 'seeing is believing' takes on new meaning if what we see is influenced by what we believe.... What we recognize and what we see are the result of much more than opening our eyes and looking.

Kelly Oliver, *Seeing Race*

Through her silhouettes, Walker re-frames the narrative of race relations.

Drawing on what she sees—*how* she sees—Walker re-vision American history and culture. As John Bowles describes it, Walker's silhouettes "appropriate white and black characters from the art, literature, and stereotypes that haunt the American imagination and that have partly determined American subjectivity" (39). By engaging the American imagination in this stark and startling way, Walker now participates in the shaping of American subjectivity. Forti's theories on race help explain Walker's role in shaping the discourse, "It is undoubtedly correct to conclude that the 'discourse' on race is a rhetoric of supremacy and conflict that redesigns the contours of belonging and order. And it is absolutely true that all theories of race are rigid in their formal definitions, and flexible in their contents, because flexibility multiplies the possibilities of their utilization" (12).

Walker's use of the form of silhouette exploits the flexibilities inherent in racial discourse. The silhouette—as a *manirhetorical* device—is nothing if not visual. Its sparse representation belies its vast promise for illustrating complex and important concepts. Whether used for portraiture or parody, its variability—as one of the plastic arts—affords adaptable racial delineation. Because Walker's textual work has the same potential for definition and compliance, her verbal profiling carries as much Barthesian punctum as her visual. In *Literature and Existentialism (or What is Literature?)*, Jean-Paul Sartre amplifies the possibilities for a self-directed—and at the same time malleable—art.

Sartre's artist is alive and well, and in *Literature*, he poses a series of questions to bring the artist's self-reflexive views to the forefront. What, he wants to know, do artists really think about when they make art? Sartre's theory of *engagement*, or commitment, exposes the writer as always "in a situation" with language, as "invested with words." Granting the artist such high authority, Sartre presents him/her in direct context with both the art and the reader/viewer. *Engagement*, he suggests, is the artist's "freedom" which is reflected in the work—a freedom, Sartre asserts—which bears both rights and responsibilities. Moreover, in drawing upon this freedom, artists imbue the work with their own "natural place" as products of their specific time and region. The work then is imbued with "being,"—a central theme of Sartre's existential philosophy.

Walker's silhouettes are "invested with words" and imbued with "being" à la Sartre. Moreover, her sophistication in both making and talking about her art demonstrates that as an artist, she is beyond what Ben Shahn [Figure 43] in *The Shape of Content* has called "the artistic tug of war between idea and image." In Walker's works, image and idea are one. Coming from a background in which "visual culture is the family business," (Als 70) Walker is a seer and interpreter by nature and an artist by training. The silhouette is the medium which best allows those two aspects to merge.

Among its varied utilities, the silhouette is an interactive rhetorical paradigm that comports accurately with the African American tradition of call-and-response. As with Mikhail Bakhtin's *dialogics*, Als shows that the intertextual aspect of silhouette requires an audience bring to the work a frame of reference or context for the content.

Aside from the word or two we can put to the race, sex, age, prototype, social function, or symbology of any given element, everything that falls within the borders of [Walker's] confabulation of silhouetted people, places, and things remains suspended somewhere between generated and projected meanings. Rather than displaying a finely wrought and reproducible message, these tableaux find their meaningful purpose in the very situations where viewers attempt to reckon with them and put them to use. (Als 74-75)

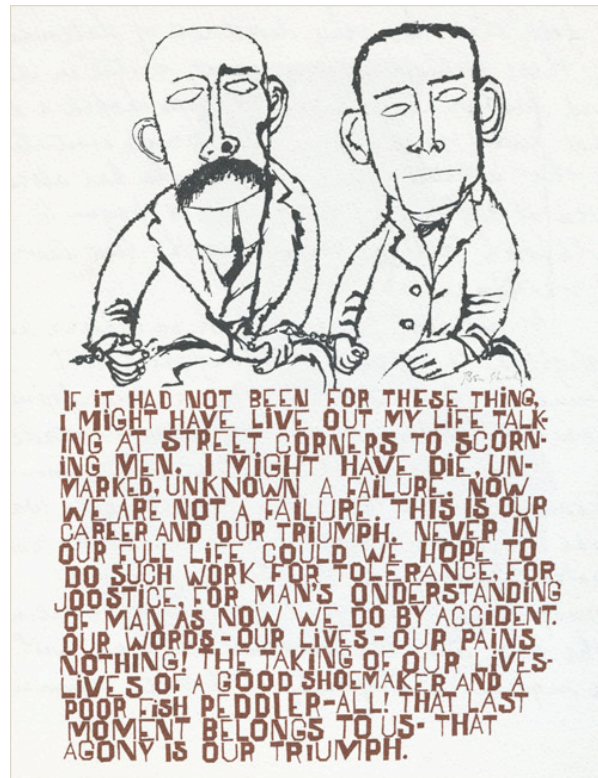


Figure 44: *The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti*, Ben Shahn, 1931-32

The form of the silhouette is ideally suited to Walker's artistic aesthetic in that it allows her full range of expression. Her proactive judgment is informed by her negative reactions to other choices. While at ACA, Walker tells Als, she had found and rejected a "kind of crafty, gothic Southern sensibility" (73). The "grotesque" tradition of writers like Flannery O'Connor is what Walker referenced and denounced. She also considered, then opted against, traditional painting techniques she associated with the colonialist European conventions she had studied during her art training. "Clearly," Als surmises, "Walker was still searching for 'pure' beauty—the elevation of shapes—and the search for a narrative that could capture both the eye and the heart" (76). She found her beauty ideal in the medium of the silhouette. Its economy of line and suggestiveness expose possibilities for Walker to upload her content of black and feminist consciousnesses.

Walker is keenly aware of the opportunities that this “ideologically proactive art” afford her (Shaw 4). She explains that for her silhouette is a “blank space that you [can] project your desire into. It can be positive or negative. It’s just a hole in a piece of paper, and it’s the inside of that hole” (qtd in Shaw 25). In this, she issues a nod to the conceptual father figure of silhouette—and then in her manner of signifying, riffs upon—Lavater himself, who wrote of the shade that, “It is not positive, it is only something negative, only the boundary line of half of the countenance” (qtd in Shaw 36).

The differences in their perspectives of positive and negative space are mainly ideological, since from a purely practical point of view—darkness to light—the silhouette is “a medium in which positive form can never be created without its negative counterpoint” (Ackerman 72). A significant area of difference between Walker’s view of the form and Lavater’s is his insistence that, “It is the immediate expression of nature” (qtd. in Shaw 36), that the shade contained an essence that was “potentially immutable” (21). By contrast, Walker sees “the hole” as merely an empty vessel waiting to be filled:



Figure 45: Page from Lavater's
Essays on Physiognomy

“The old silhouettes...seem almost ironic to me—all those whites portrayed as entirely black. I am searching for a form whose very flatness makes it appear as if it could not possibly embody anything essential. But this form is also a kind of snare: people take a peek simply because it looks nice and pleasurable. And then suddenly, they may start seeing a few things that aren’t quite so nice.” (qtd. in Ackerman)

Rites of Passage

In moving from experience of social life to conceptualization and intellectual history, I follow the path of anthropologists almost everywhere. Although we take theories into the field with us, these become relevant only if and when they illuminate social reality. Moreover, we tend to find very frequently that it is not a theorist's whole system which so illuminates, but his scattered ideas, his flashes of insight taken out of systemic context and applied to scattered data. Such ideas have a virtue of their own and may generate new hypotheses. They even show how scattered facts may be systematically connected! Randomly distributed through some monstrous logical system, they resemble nourishing raisins in a cellular mass of inedible dough. The intuitions, not the tissue of logic connecting them, are what tend to survive in the field experience. Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*

The swans with the black heads came very organically. I was thinking about objects of beauty and destruction. I first used them in a piece meant to be a comment on my ownership of stereotypical black forms. This conversation was happening as to who has the right to use stereotypical images of blacks. Do they reinforce cultural values that set African Americans back generations, or are they fair-game images that preexist you and me? I think that images, these hand-drawn characters I make, have the ambiguous duty of being both part of the real world (which is cruel and nasty) and the world of other images (which sometimes pretend to be noble, but are often concealing disgusting intentions). Kara Walker, Interview with Mattea Harvey, *Bomb*

In his 1975 text, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, Victor Turner focuses on the concept of *limen*—literally ‘threshold’—and the term *liminality*. Turner's concept of liminality is both ambiguous and loaded with prospect. He associates rites of passage—profound human milestones—with *liminality*, states of being ‘betwixt and between’ such as the syncretic position occupied by the “Ethiopian” slave prodigy of Boston's John and Susannah, Phillis Wheatley. It was with great irony that a young Wheatley characterized being brought from Africa to America: “‘Twas mercy brought me from my *pagan* land.” In later writings, she gives a more honest account of her sense of her captivity, remarking that the love of liberty is born into the human breast. According to Turner, the greater the sense of powerlessness (such as with a child), the greater the need for positive anti-structural activities, or *communitas*. Art is one of the forms of *communitas*, or counterdiscourse, embraced by the powerless.

Because these acts of *communitas* disrupt the existing social structure, they often create conflict. In Wheatley's case, she was extolled as a great talent at a very early age, and her poetry was published in England with the assistance of her mistress Susannah. The Wheatleys were so proud of their "Sable Muse" that they sponsored a trip to Europe to finalize her publication. It was during her trip abroad that Wheatley got her first taste of freedom and wrote about it in subtle ways in poems and letters to prominent whites. Thus, her art was a rebuke to slavery in two ways—through covert and overt messages, as well as through the very fact of her high level of aptitude as an artist. The fact that Wheatley displayed great mental, creative—even political—acuity was itself an admonishment to one of the philosophical groundings of mid-Atlantic slavery—that the Africans were barbaric and better suited for physical labor than any rational endeavor.

Moreover, being a sickly child, Wheatley was not a good prospect for Southern slavery with its rigors of agricultural planting and harvesting. Instead, she had been sent to the Boston auction block along with other infirm and some aged Africans to participate in the more domestic form of slavery in the North. Yet, even under those circumstances—being given educational and social opportunities many whites did not have—Wheatley still yearned to belong to herself. Her art followed her status to the extent that her words were captive—veiled and demure—while her spirit was in utter turmoil. She became an abolitionist in earnest after having experienced "technical" emancipation in England—where slavery had already been abolished—and once she became a noted poet in her own right. She is credited as a catalyst in slavery's demise, even after her freedom was awarded, following the deaths of Susannah, then John. In "On the Death of General Wooster" she writes, "But how presumptuous shall we hope to find / Divine acceptance with th' Almighty mind / While yet (O deed ungenerous!) they disgrace / And hold in bondage Afric's blameless race?" (qtd. in Hill 103).

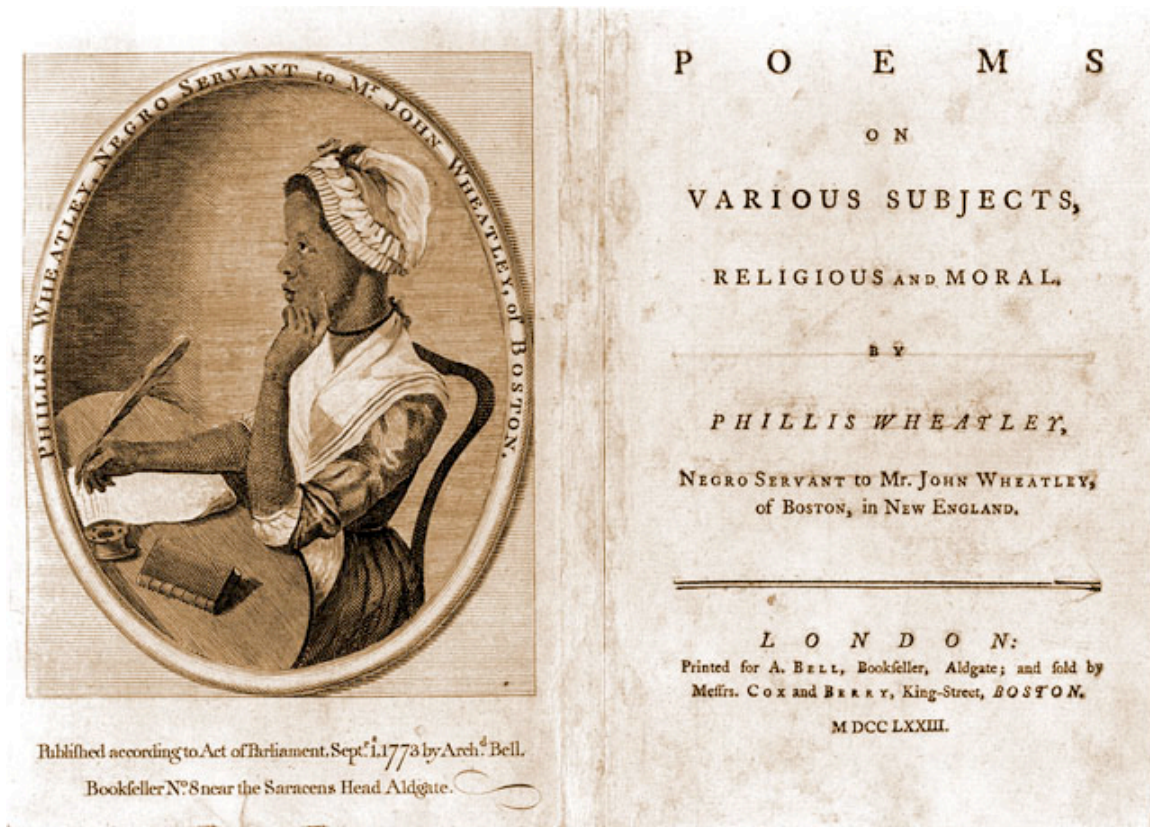


Figure 46: Miss Phillis Wheatley on Book Cover

As such, Wheatley is a good illustration of Turner's paradigm for *liminality*, and for *communitas* as a method of conflict resolution. Because of the shifts in her nationality—from African to American; in her personal and professional maturation—from child prodigy to famed poet; and in her political status—from enslaved to free—Wheatley demonstrates that art can be both a means of awakening, and an end to an undesired condition. In other words, Wheatley's art served as both an internal motivator for her own purposes, and as an external incentive to her audience to consider their own attitudes and actions. Her poetry enabled Wheatley to take stock of her own thoughts about her enslavement, just as her poetry and letters spoke volumes to whites who were in a position to effect the end of the institution. This dual-functioning aspect of art is remarkably consistent with Turner's emphasis on method over makeup.

Reacting against a counter-paradigm of structuralism that was dominant during his tenure at the University of Chicago, Turner advocated attention to process over a search for meaning in “pure” structure—in fixed signs and symbols. His focus on mode and procedure highlighted the fluidity of culture in place of its stagnancy—a position which jibes well with a desire for societal upheaval. Whereas structuralists gave credence to the persistence of extant causes and conditions, Turner based his theories on the fact that society is messy and constantly in flux—even recognizing that there are dogged inconsistencies in class and racial hierarchies. His view of the “pilgrimage” as a rite of passage is particularly germane to Wheatley’s incidents of physical and psychic voyage—which Turner calls “rites of status elevation.” He describes incidents of “ritual or status reversal” as cultural transgressions—examples of “turnabouts of normal social status” in which the last become first, the poor become rich, and the powerless seize and display elements of power. Moreover, he writes, “Just as important are the ways a society finds in these public rituals of commenting on and critiquing itself” (467).

Death by a Thousand Cuts

Like Wheatley, Walker is a remarkable example of using art as a public ritual. Her silhouettes exist within a liminal rhetorical zone that Turner calls “anti-structure”—a bottoms-up approach to critique society’s moral ills and to activate societal change.

Here there is not so much the symbolism of birth, maturation, death, and rebirth - that is, of linear developments - but rather the continuous presence of a metalanguage - that is, codes or presentation and expression which enable participants and spectators to realize just how far they have fallen short of or transgressed their own ideal standards, or even, in some kinds of ritual, to call those very ideals into question under conditions of sharp social change. I have spoken about liminal time. I now distinguish between everyday social space and liminal space. In public metasocial rites we have to do with public liminality, and such rites are often performed in the village or town square, in full view of everyone. They are not secret affairs, performed in caves or groves or in lodges protected from profanation by poisoned arrows. All performances require framed spaces set off from the routine world. But metasocial rites use *quotidian* spaces as their stage; they merely hallow them for a liminal time. (467)

Walker has become an artist whose public persona and artwork are ubiquitous. Although there may at one time have been a perception of the museum or art gallery as a sacred or consecrated site—as per Benjamin—in 2010, those venues are more or less common spaces. Moreover, Walker’s fame as an artist and public figure places her and her work squarely in view of the mass media—encompassing visual, print, and digital sources. As well, because of cultural influences and the confessional and revelatory nature of her work, Walker’s *anima* projection is also on public display. She writes,

I began a journey, in which I collated and coveted every conceivable attitude, innuendo, and stereotype about black womanhood in particular, and negritude, racism, and history by default. My sources were the intimate murmurings of white lovers, black girlfriends, hairdressers, art professors, one-night stands, family members, and all of you. When no one was available I invented them by myself.... I made a game of dredging my subconscious for four hundred years’ worth of metaphor with which to assess my lived present, in effect making up an historical romance in which I played the protagonist(s), the author, and the outside observer/participant. (*Signs*)

Juxtaposing ideas and identities is key, as Shaw explains that Karl Jung’s concepts of *anima/animus* projection develop and inform Walker’s work. *Anima* and *animus* are the masculine and feminine forms of the Greek for *psyche*—to wit—the mind, the intellect, the consciousness, but also the power to feel and sense. For Jung, “The shadow, the anima, or the spirit within represents our hidden nature, and as such it is generally opposite in the temperament to what is revealed on the outside” (qtd in Shaw 40).

The discourse on silhouette is inherently rife with interior/exterior associations—*anima/animus* projections. Shaw elucidates Walker’s uses of her own personal history and her public expressions of the history surrounding black culture. She writes, “With their elegant, albeit negative, form, Walker’s silhouettes express a void: an unknowable black hole, a kind of blank darkness, which is signified by an outer contour line.... This delineation produces an extraordinary space of psychological projection” (Shaw 39). Walker’s silhouettes contextualize her own and black psychology.

One of Walker's most famous, and perhaps her most aphoristic of the silhouettes is the self-referential *Cut*, [Figure 47] based on an *Interview Magazine* photo:

CUT, Kara Walker's 1998 portrait, examines her role as an African American woman artist in the public sphere. It is a life-size silhouette, cut from black paper and glued to the gallery wall, showing a young woman sailing through space, her arms thrown over her head. Her breasts jut forward as her back arches, her skirt billows up, and her heels click together. Her hair is plaited in low thin braids, each about four inches long, like those of a little girl. They dance lightly behind her back, caught up in the displaced air. However, all is not well in this image of airborne ecstasy, for both of her wrists have been cut, nearly severed at the joint by the straight razor that she holds in her left hand. Four sprays of blood erupt from the wounds and gather in two thickened puddles beneath her. (Shaw *Unspeakable* 125)



Figure 47: *CUT* by Kara Walker, 1998

Cut is a work of great symbolism. For Shaw, the self-portraiture “ironically suggests that [Walker’s] work is the cause of her own death” (*Seeing* 135). She writes,

In *CUT*.... the artist’s wrists are slashed so that the blood spurts out in arcing plumes becoming feathers with pointed tips at their roots, tips that in turn seem to pierce the flesh from which they grow. As she sails through the air, she resembles a fallen angel whose wings have been clipped and then sent plunging rapidly toward the earth.... The figure that presses against her skirts, pushing her forward through the air as if against her will, might well be the ultimate arbiter of her destiny, for only he can see what lies in store. It would seem that there is no possibility of transcendence through visuality, that the pain of invention will all too soon outweigh the pleasure [of] self-expression.... Ultimately there is no alternative but to let the blood pool up in sticky puddles as the body flies, out of control and fixed in place, toward the gallery floor. (“Final” 131)

Perhaps more pointedly, and in keeping with Turner’s theories on *liminality*, the visual representations in *Cut* suggest not Walker’s physical—and certainly not her artistic—death, but a psychic one—the death of Walker’s racial innocence. Shaw describes *Cut* as a work of “scathing self-analysis” (129), and Walker is certainly adept at self-scrutiny: “I have reached a splitting point, a break with my past...with my past twenty-(three) years of do-gooder subjectivity, comfort, and the Afro-suburban experience” (*Witness* 269).

The split from a lack of black consciousness to racial hyper-consciousness has helped Walker expand her reach in producing her art, and in articulating her aesthetic theories. Having come into her racial own, she is as engaged verbally—in interviews, in her texts, and in the contextual narrative she uses for her silhouettes—in expressing the rhetoric of race as she is in developing the visual medium of silhouette. She is almost embarrassingly forthcoming in interviews—prompting Als to characterize Walker’s openness as “a compulsion to reveal herself” (74). He quotes her friend and an artistic collaborator, Thelma Golden, as remarking, “Sometimes, when we’re having a dialogue that’s meant for publication, I say to Kara, ‘Do you really want to say that?,’ and the answer is always yes” (qtd. in Als 74). Fortunately for the world of art, her bloodletting in speech, text, and the silhouette signals not just a psychic death, but also a resurrection.

Born Again?

The silhouette *Cut* is based on a Noe DeWitt photograph of Walker that accompanied the March 1998 interview conducted by James Hannaham—the artist’s actual cousin—a frequent *Village Voice* contributor and novelist. Walker is depicted, according to the caption, as “The Art World’s New Negro.” That phrase—a very specific one—pertains to the paradigm for the physically and mentally free—a riff on the moniker coined by Alain Locke in *The New Negro*. In Locke’s view, the post-Civil War Negro was being reborn—hence the Black Arts Renaissance—from captivity into freedom; from rural citizenry into urbanity; from mythhood into manhood; and from weakness into a position of strength. He claimed that, “By shedding the old chrysalis of the Negro problem we are achieving something like a spiritual emancipation” (qtd. in Hill 859). There is, however, a more insidious operative at work in taking the phrase out of context and applying it to Walker. For Shaw, the phrase suggests Walker is the white art world’s teacher’s pet—the “flavor of the month” in white art circles (139).

Undoubtedly, Walker’s acceptance and acclaim has placed her and her medium in a rarified stratum of celebrity, but that recognition has come at a price. While part of that bill has come due from Walker herself—with her endless self-analysis—she has also been charged a heavy toll of entry by the establishment black art oligarchy. She has faced grave criticism, in fact, from at least one prominent black female artist whose work served as an impetus for Walker’s own artistic development—Betye Saar. Following the announcement of Walker as recipient of the MacArthur Award, Saar sent out hundreds of letters to fellow black artists, critics, and others with interests in the arts warning them of a traitor in their midst. Frequent *Village Voice* contributor Jerry Saltz characterized Saar’s attack on Walker as placing a “veritable fatwa on her head.” Ironically, Saar, of Aunt Jemima fame, signed her letter, “an artist against negative black images.”

Of Walker, Saltz writes,

No one gets out of Kara Walker's world alive, not even the artist. In one of her characteristic, nearly life-size black silhouettes in cut paper, a naked black girl kneels to suck the cock of a white slaver. We're already in deep water. He has the claws and paws of Satan, the jaw of an ape. His cock goes into her mouth and out her ass. The image is titled *Successes*. To [her critics] Kara Walker is a demon: the black girl in *Successes* who stoops to accommodate the white art world. Funny thing is, Walker would probably find these readings somewhat on the mark. (artnet.com)



Figure 48: *Successes*, Kara Walker, 1998

Saar has been joined in her concern about Walker's "motifs and motivations" by other prominent and vocal artists and critics. In asking, "Are African-Americans being betrayed under the guise of art?" (qtd. in English 78), Saar was opening a floodgate of dialogue that has hardly abated, well into Walker's second decade as a public artist. Her fellow artist Michael Harris, as one example, feels that Walker perpetuates a form of racism that is particularly pernicious—the black-on-black version known as intraracism:

When we become artists who use Pickaninnies as a means to develop notoriety and artistic success, there's no need for a Klan. There's no need for any kind of racist opposition because we are so Stockholmed to the point where we will begin to oppress ourselves if we're not careful. It's rare that we get someone who breaks through who's not talking about, or to, whites. (qtd. in English 78)

Critics like Harris see little critique or analysis in Walker's use of familiar and stock images of blacks, without which she is guilty of what is called in the black community 'airing the dirty laundry'—serving up the inner life of the race for white consumption. In this regard, the naysayers believe, Walker is setting the race back—not forward.

Walker's signifying is seemingly lost on such detractors. They are neither amused nor entertained by her antics, and they are not shy or intimidated to voice their displeasure. An entire volume, edited by a fellow artist and strong nemesis, Howardena Pindell, has been dedicated to parsing Walker's work. *Kara Walker—No* | *Kara Walker—Yes* | *Kara Walker—?* contains 29 essays, including one by Pindell, dedicated to "attempting ... to emphasize the damage Walker (and the media) had done to the entire African American art community." Just a scant few pages in the volume are dedicated to the "Yes" responses to Walker—and are represented by reprinted and excerpted interviews, blog postings, and reviews. The dearth of acclaim in the book is striking since, according to Pindell, the media has been "blinded by Walker's work—by her incendiary images of the enslaver and the enslaved—exploiting their sexual relationships and bodily functions in a provocative style closer to pulp fiction and other sub-culture periodicals" (120). Even fewer pages are reserved for those who are undecided [read: mostly negative] about Walker's impact, those who feel similarly to many of her critics that her work is being "lauded for all the wrong reasons" (133).

It is clear that Walker is fulfilling a goal to create provocative art. The Negress, for instance, functions as a lightning rod that draws criticism to Walker. She is, as Shaw describes her, "the fantasy slave woman of Walker's imagination," who is, like Walker, "caught between consent and condition" (159). Her power to shape black characters often dismays her critics—who, like Saar, see it as a "form of betrayal" (qtd. in Pindell viii)—but delights Walker. She appears determined to 'let her haters be her motivators.'

For me they become characters the moment I start working with them because they become mine in a way. So that when I encounter the much-contested African American tchotchkes and derogatory images, they don't have the power over me they used to.... Being an artist in control of characters that represent the social manipulations that blacks have undergone in this country at least, puts me in the position of being the controller or the puppet master of imaginary black people. (qtd in Shaw 18)

Walker's is not a politically—or some of her disparagers would add, racially—correct art. One of the most objectionable qualities of her work may be its tendency to minimize the victimization of blacks—particularly abnegating sexual domination of black women by white males. An excerpt from Karsten Kredel's *the taz* appears in *No! Yes*. It elaborates on Walker's politically incorrect rhetoric on black female sexuality:

Walker doesn't reject the role of the voluptuous 'negress,' but rather takes it on experimentally: to be, as someone who is both desired and feared, 'a little bit of a slave' in order to counter the measuring gaze and to draw up a relationship of mutual dependence... by not leaving the realm of fantasy to white men, she rejects the responsibility of representation. This could be seen negatively, but one could just as well value it as a 'liberating act.' (qtd. in Pindell 134)

A major concern is that one woman's liberating act can be viewed as reinscribing the servility of another. More importantly, and perhaps most devastatingly for Saar, Pindell, Harris, and other black artists is that Walker's role-playing, and her visual representations of such play-acting, can be viewed as acquiescing to—rather than resisting—white predilections and prejudices about black lasciviousness.

Unquestioningly, white fears and projections about black sexuality do factor—in at least a subliminal fashion—in current race relations. English, in fact, borrows Shaw's use of the "unseeable" to describe "the shaping of Walker's ego by the lingering horror of slavery"—dysfunctional sexual relations between masters and slaves being part of the physical and emotional residue of slavery (94). Walker is well aware of that history and those dynamics, explaining to Als: "One of the motifs in my work is that as a black girl I am a thing which is violated by filthy beasts" (75). Still she says,

I've been interested in the way in which black people (or commonly "African Americans"), or the way at least I responded to, or ignored, or reaffirmed or reinforced certain stereotypes about myself, other blacks, or more interestingly—white people—who retain a sense of white supremacy blithely unaware of the power Black life has over them. The silhouette is the most concise way of summing up a number of interests. [It is a way] to try and uncover the often subtle and uncomfortable ways racism, and racist and sexist stereotypes influence and script our everyday lives. (qtd. in English 84-85).

Send in the Clown

While Walker's work is totally inventive, and not parodic—in the sense of being imitative—it does rely for inspiration upon extant pathologies in black/white relations. It uses them to complicate the common discourse. As Als observes, “Walker...[has] explored not only the white world's fetishization of control and dominance, but the black community's complicity in its own emotional enslavement” (77). Walker, for her part, not only notes the irony of this juxtapositioning, but participates in it, remarking,

If it can still be construed that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction...(which we can argue about later) then the answer would be that I willingly submit in order to reject... that in submission there is dominance and in adopting these signifiers I reject them... that all sounds too easy... and in fact it is the spaces in between these oppositions that I am attempting to give coherent form to. (*Witness* 269)

One of the ways Walker seeks to navigate the ‘spaces between oppositions’ is with her use of blackface. This tragicomic genre has become “a way for African-American artists to examine the complexity of their commodification in the marketplace and the public sphere,” Shaw writes (34). Like the silhouette, it has become Walker's simultaneous medium and message. It is a means she uses for its own critique.

Walker derives her imagery in part from the tradition of the minstrel show, which she redeploys to subversive ends. Historically performed by white actors in blackface, the minstrel theater parodied the lives of African Americans and allowed whites to vicariously break their own cultural taboos by portraying unbridled sexuality and puerile behavior. In her work, Walker inverts the roles of these characters. Her stylized figures enact the violence that attends oppression as they embody scenes of bestiality, castration, murder and cannibalism. (Guggenheim 196)



Figure 49: Kara Walker, *Untitled* from *American Primitives*, 1996

Like racism, the practice of blackface has a long and tortured history. It is *made in America*—a homegrown set of conventions—a twisted, ersatz source of national pride. As an off-humorous cultural practice, it is also a particularly malignant rhetorical strategy. Morrison, who has long written on racism's curious embodiment, refers to, "...The estranged body, the legislated body, the violated, rejected, deprived body—the body as consummate home. In virtually all of these formations, whatever the terrain, race magnifies these matters" (qtd. in Willink 20). As text, the body is a temporal agent, but text also confers history. Roland Barthes conveys this idea when he writes, "I feel that the Photograph creates my body or mortifies it, according to its caprice" (11). As a direct descendant of the photograph, the silhouette—particularly in Walker's capable hands—has the same power to solidify the body, even in a fluid forum such as race. In the rhetorical exchange between culture and representation, what dies in blackface is not the black body, the referent—but blackness, the signified. Meanwhile, the signifier, as cultural interloper, remains intact as sign of dominance, as one with denotative power.

Through the embodiment of crude racial stereotyping, blackness—as cultural entity—is mortified both literally and figuratively in blackface, fixed and contained in comic mortmain (inalienability). That is the power that Walker has seized—the power to resurrect the black body from/through the symbolism and meta-code attached to it. But this feat of derring-do is even more mortifying to Walker's critics, because that burlesque practice of racial/ist reinscription is occurring within the race, as well as without. In this, Walker shares the stage with an artistic ancestor. It is therefore instructive to consider the interesting case of Bert Williams, a mixed race actor of classical training, and later part of the most successful minstrel team, Walker and Williams. As a jongleur in the Ziegfeld Follies, Williams became wealthy and influential, playing a command performance for England's King Edward VII in 1904.



Figure 50: The Two Faces of Bert Williams, c1900

Though it was never Williams' intent to earn his living in the image of a buffoon, he discovered during the early 1900's that Vaudeville had no place for an "uppity"—an educated and ambitious—Negro like him. Relegated to performing in corked blackface in the dress of a down-and-out clown, Williams built reputations for himself and for friends in the industry like his collaborator, George Walker. Another friend, fellow comic performer W.C. Fields, would later say of him, "Bert Williams was the funniest man I ever saw, and the saddest man I ever knew." In life as in art: Fields' words also apply to the tragicomic rhetoric of blackface. In his only known essay, Williams wrote:

People sometimes ask me if I would not give anything to be white. I answer . . . most emphatically, "No." How do I know what I might be if I were a white man? I might be a sandhog, burrowing away and losing my health for \$8 a day. I might be a streetcar conductor at \$12 or \$15 a week. There is many a white man less fortunate and less well-equipped than I am. In fact, I have never been able to discover that there was anything disgraceful in being a colored man. But I have often found it inconvenient . . . in America. (qtd. in Brooks 174)

Walker, too, has been "inconvenienced" by her racial identity—even accused of pandering to the aims of whiteness by committing one of the worst elements within anti-black racism—blaming the victim. Too black for some, and not black enough for others:

There's a funny place in the minstrel show parallel to the work of an artist, particularly in black performers blackening up and relating to that constructed image of constructed blackness. To whom is it entertaining? Where is this fuzzy location where pride and humiliation come together? (K. Walker, qtd. in Blume)

Walker seems inherently to recognize and accept her role as modern-day court jester—as one who is seen as comic, but who is also a bearer of wisdom, even when the truth is not so much called *forth*, as called *for*. In other words, while Walker’s message—in its various interpretations—may not be wanted *per se*, there is a sense in which her work meets a social and cultural need and fills an ideological niche. As she explains,

I was looking at racist paraphernalia, iconography, and then at these accurate versions of middle-class Americans. I began to associate the silhouette itself, the cutting, with a form of blackface minstrelsy. Here we have these mainly white sitters or a few slaves who were documented in silhouette- but for the most part white sitters whom I identify as middle class because upper class would require a full-fledged oil portrait and that’s what I had already ruled out for myself...’No oil painting here, not going to ape the master that way.’
(<http://www.pbs.org/art21/slideshow/?slide=280&artindex=72>)

Thus, while she recognizes the risks involved in working with blackface minstrelsy, she has already calculated the potential collateral damage; and she has gauged the effort as worthwhile. Walker has staked her livelihood as an artist on having such risks pay off.

Still, she is not insensitive to concerns about the form; she remains ambivalent about her uses of blackface. She also feels conflicted about who her target audience might actually be. Moreover, her viewers have a tendency to feel that same conflict and confusion upon an initial viewing—before they draw their own conclusions about what Walker is up to. Julia Szabo, a *New York Times* reporter, confesses her own hesitancy, writing, “...this art cannot exactly be called race-positive and viewers, especially white ones like myself (I own two prints, one of them “I’ll Be a Monkey’s Uncle”), implicate themselves, unsure whether they are rooting for the nigger wench or colluding with her white oppressors.” Walker concedes to Szabo that she too holds a precarious position, suspended between the black and white communities. She confesses, “I feel a bit like...Stepin Fetchit” (140), referring to the first black performer to become a millionaire, an early 20th century minstrel singer and comedian—a contemporary of Bert Williams.

A House Negress

Blackface is as divisive an issue within the black community as it is between blacks and whites. As part of a racist tradition, even the recuperation of the genre can be difficult for some blacks—particularly those with strong Civil Rights orientations—to appreciate. For them, the wounds of racism are still too tender. Yet as part of a *hyperblack* aesthetic, Walker exploits what blackface offers: “Blackface representations can be turned against their original intent... [of denigrating blacks],” writes cultural critic Mikko Tuhkanen, who has labeled artists who practice such improvisation on a theme, “so-called neo-coons” (29). “Neo-coon” is a resuscitation of a slur used in the Jim Crow South for blacks who were so dark, only the whites of their eyes could be seen.

Worst—Walker’s critics believe her art reflects an attitude that predates even that. And they are right in many respects— Walker’s work does draw upon some very graphically sexual and violent aspects within the history of slavery in the US. Thus, according to Pindell, Walker’s work is “a continuation of the plantation system and mentality” (qtd. in English 80). The plantation system refers to a mythos of the “house slave” and “field slave” schism. It holds that a house slave, because of his proximity to the “big house” and to the master and mistress, would receive better treatment; would have less strenuous work requirements; and would therefore have a much less painful and denigrating experience of slavery. He or she might even live inside of the master’s quarters, and have charge of the children or preparation of the family’s food. There were certain intimacies presumed by that proximity. By contrast, the field slave would be subject to the whims of harsh overseers; would have demanding duties on the farm or plantation; and would live in dormitory-like housing with other slaves, or even animals. He or she would be a farmhand, a construction worker, or a nursemaid for the mistress, would receive only the slightest rations of clothing or food, and only negative attention.

By those standards, Walker's treatment, as the mainstream art world's "New Negro" situates her squarely as a domestic slave. English writes, "Known also as the 'big house,' 'white house,' 'master's house,' and 'mammy's house' in later vernaculars, it recurs in Walker's tableaux as frequently as the Negress herself and is perhaps the most charged of all of their scenographic elements" (132). In this regard, the Negress and the plantation house are graphically—if not psychically--interconnected. Thus for her critics, Walker is still in bondage to the 'master' and is securely ensconced in his residence because her art has earned her that place—because it has made her the new overseer, who now uses images rather than a whip to help keep blacks *in their place*.

The theme of *place* is a very strong undercurrent in the black community because of the division of labor in slavery—inside and outside—but also because of importunate praxes of social and geographic segregation following slavery, up to the present. "Red-lining" in real estate—steering black prospective buyers away from traditionally white neighborhoods; white flight from inner-cities to suburbs; or conversely, gentrification of predominantly black urban communities; are all activities designed to keep the races separate and un-equal, and to reinforce cultural and class isolation. Walker has by now travelled the earth—with exhibitions all over Europe (Austria, Switzerland, Sweden, Israel, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, UK, France, and Spain), and in North and South America. Yet, although seemingly no doors have been closed to her, the custom of segregation has not escaped her. In fact, despite her declarations of being shielded from racial prejudice in her earlier life in California, there were omens of its horrors even before she arrived in Georgia. Belcove uncovered, as she pressed Walker during their interview, that "certain less than idyllic recollections" did come to mind. Walker recalls, for example, being turned away from a fancy restaurant in San Francisco because, as the doorman announced, "There are no niggers in there" (Belcove 2). What of a Negress?

It could very well be that early incident which planted a seed for Walker's later work. Being turned away from a swanky restaurant may not be a turning point for many people, but for someone—an artist—with Walker's sensibilities and sensitivities, it could stoke a flame for power, for control, for a command of jurisdiction so that she would never be turned away again. Walker has found—or better yet—has invented such a place; and in true Walker style, it is a revision of an ill-reputed original—the slave plantation. “Walker identifies with Afro-American history as if she herself had experienced this past. She calls the tobacco and cotton plantations of the antebellum South—the background to her narratives—‘my inner plantation’” (Moshenson 56).

What could Walker possibly be thinking? To know the history and horrors of Southern slavery is to want to escape it—not revisit it. And certainly not to build an entire corpus of work—if not an entire aesthetic—around it. But Walker is an artist who defies conventional wisdom and resists comprehension through normative routes. She is, like many silhouettists before her, a prolific artist. An archivist, in fact, would be hard put to catalogue her cuttings, or to even count their numbers—particularly since so many of them bear the symbolic label: *Untitled*—so in keeping with the innumerability and facelessness of African slaves. But there is more to the copiousness of her work. Her work is, by her own accounts, fueled by rage. It is as if the artist were racially unconscious for so long that upon awakening, she determined never to sleep again.

And in her restlessness, Walker has used her artistry to create an entire world—one not completely estranged from the old one, but one that reinterprets it—which institutes, as Turner denotes, a counterdiscourse—a *communitas*. That is what Walker's plantation represents, a seemingly enchanted—though sinister—place, where black is white, weak is strong, right is wrong, and all manner of presuppositions are re-supposed. Even the name is a reconstruction. About her “inner plantation,” she says,

I imagine we all have one. I discovered mine while painting and thinking about what a godlike game it is we artists play with our canvases (or whatever, it was canvases for me at one time) forcing colors and figures and allegories to do our bidding, as if they had no will of their own. Trying to give shape to some perversion or goal in a painting is akin to the 'blank slate' attitude of early settlers in America. Maybe it's just a defect of the imagination, but once I began to think of myself—the Painter—as this kind of Master my canvas became the Plantation and anything I put down would be my Slave. But not content to assume this new position I simultaneously freed all those slaves, unchained all the imprisoned Coons, Negroes, Missies, and Mammies and mixed them up with Frederick Douglasses, Nat Turners, Harriet Tubmans.
(qtd. in English 97)

Aside from providing a venue for her seeming god-complex, Walker's inner plantation is a haven of sorts for the cast of characters that people her imagination, and ultimately her narrative tableaux. It is a psychic source of creative empowerment for Walker. She explains, "In a way making the silhouettes kind of saved me. Simplified the frenzy I was working myself into, created the outward appearance of calm" (qtd in Shaw 13). So Harris, Pindell and others are right—Walker remains on a plantation of sorts.

However, Walker's inner plantation illustrates *communitas* to the full extent, in that it subverts the traditional power structure of the Southern antebellum farmstead. In so doing, it must first memorialize it. And therein lies the rub. By using just enough of the familiar and comfortable, Walker is able to bring the viewer in, get the viewer—or what have by now been called "readers"—engaged in the enfolding drama of the narrative panorama. Then all-of-a-sudden, she snatches a hidden wire that releases the trap door. Whoosh—the solid ground has fallen out beneath! All at once the reader is in *Walker World*, and she never knew what hit her, didn't see it coming, but now has to face a new reality. And she must face that reality on Walker's terms [Figures 50,51].

Arguably the most durable and evocative synthetic icon in artistic and literary representations of slavery, the plantation house works within the tableaux as an object that is being misremembered *now*: it is the signal by which Walker's faux-historical counterculture of diversions from slavery conveys its estrangement from the institution and its nearness to us. Doubtless it is one of the shrewdest means by which the tableaux at once invite and confound description... (English 132)



Figure 51: Panorama Excerpt from Kara Walker's *The Renaissance Society*, 1997



Figure 52: Detail of the Young Negress as Marionette from *The Renaissance Society*, 1997

Ink Spots or Inkblots?

Little is left to chance on Walker's inner plantation. Her design ethos is both carefully planned and meticulously executed. Her choices in media attach to her message so synchronistically that they meld into synthesis and give her work great integrity—if not aesthetic or philosophical appeal. Yet, what makes Walker's use of the silhouette most compelling from a rhetorical perspective is the converse—the very effect of fraction—of disruption—of opening up both a form—the shade or black paper cutout—and a corpus of content—the history of slavery—that have been previously—seemingly immutably—inscribed upon the national consciousness. Thus, Walker's gift to racial linguistics is her visual acumen—intelligence being a trait that is commonly defined as the ability to hold and balance two conflicting ideas at once. What is more, it is not just Walker's ability to hold conflicting ideas, but the fact that she engages viewers in their own rhetorical balancing acts. In the virtual reality that is *Walker World*,

The scenes' active components, because their color and shapes are at once hypersuggestive yet almost eagerly open to interpretation, stimulate distance-and desire-effects that throw open the pictorial structure of slavery that so faithfully serves Walker's detractors. But to resituate slavery's representation within a present-day scheme of things is precisely not to disrespect its memory; rather, it acknowledges underscoring what will always remain contemporary about it. (English 88)

In contemporary parlance, the phrase “things are not so black and white” is used to suggest rhetorical openness and *liminality*; but with Walker the very inverse is true. In Walker's hands, it is precisely because things *are* so black and white, that nothing is quite what it appears to be. In flipping-the-script in this way, Walker simultaneously takes measure of, and reflects, society's views on race, and provokes viewers into taking their own racial temperatures. “As further indictment of our tendency to stereotype, the cutouts are all of the same color—most commonly black—and merely outline Walker's figures in profile, yet viewers instantly identify them by race” (Belcove 4).

The element of automatic recognition makes silhouette a perfect medium for the artist because it so closely mirrors her issues and concerns. Her “unwieldy imagination is fixated with race in the starkest and most American of terms, black and white, as they were forged in the ante-bellum South, a time not so long ago in a galaxy called here” (H. Walker, *Parkett* 152). The severity of her images provides a context—a backstory—that she can then employ as contrast to shock the audience into a new awareness. Thus, she invokes the re-visitation or “rememory” of slavery she hopes and works for (Shaw 38).



Figure 53: Excerpt of the “Sculpting” Negress from Walker’s *The Renaissance Society*, 1997

Walker relishes her role as provocateur. Her silhouettes are bi-focal and bi-functional—generative and degenerative—and therefore invite and depend upon multiple readings. Through them, Walker “both resurrects and deconstructs” (Shaw 68) the history of slavery and its aftermath. The purpose of the rememory is incendiary as she tells Shaw, “The audience has to deal with their own prejudices or fear or desires when they look at these images. So if anything, my work attempts to take those ‘pickaninny’ images and put them up there and eradicate them” (qtd. in Shaw 104).

What Walker seems to have found in the medium of silhouette is an inventive shape that can both inform her racial development as well as contain it. Yet, even as a great artist and—for the purposes of this study—as an exceptional race rhetorician, Walker cannot take all the credit for the acclaim her work has received. Much of her success is owing to the history and provenance of her medium of silhouette, and her skill in expanding that history. English adds to this understanding:

Whereas in its prior late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century life as a private image, the silhouette gave presence to that which maturity or death had rendered absent, Walker's silhouettes function differently. They are overtly fantastical, proclaiming the compensatory nature of their use and failures these qualities make inevitable. When this use mimics such acts as those which help gendering and racialization to accomplish themselves, it draws the whole process into dialogue with the appropriations of bodies and subject by ideologies of history. (85)

Walker's silhouettes are *dialogic* in the sense that they invite interaction between the artist and the audience. They so effectively serve as racial stimuli, as social catalysts, because they are at the same time closed and open—inscribed and yet-to-be-inscribed.

Perhaps because of their discomfiting departure from the norm, the tableaux literally impart to the viewer a creative role in the representation of slavery. One hears a great deal about art that lures onlookers into fantasy scenarios; Walker's tableaux, however, derive their power from the elements of reality that obtain in them if thinly. (English 88)

Her racial representations through the black paper cutout provide a visual and psychic blankness into which the reader/viewer can insert his/her own motives and meanings. In this way, the silhouettes are contested rhetorical sites that operate in keeping with the Rorschach or inkblot tests of psychology. Here it is worthy of note and instructive that the Rorschach was developed in 1921 by the Swiss psychologist Hermann Rorschach—a countryman of Johann Kaspar Lavater. It is also true that even though both media pre-date their progenitors (by as much as centuries), both were systematized and institutionalized by them. They can, in fact, have similar outcomes—revealing personality traits, and in some cases, belief disorders—such as racist views.

Sources of such ambiguous designs as the Rorschach are as varied as those for the black paper cutout. The inkblot has been traced back to the 17th century Italian artist Leonardo da Vinci, who has also been associated with the silhouette. Leonardo's *Vitruvian Man* is a cultural icon and a graphic representation of man's inner and outer "proportions." In that work, as well as in his codices of animals and architecture, he explores his interests in physiognomy and anatomy. A representation of that work now appears on the Euro coin. Leonardo is linked to the inkblot by way of his technique of painting, and his uses of light, figure composition, and graduated tone for symbolic representation. *Sfumato*—Leonardo's smoke—is a trademark technique that is featured in what is likely the world's most famous painting, the *Mona Lisa*. Although few of his paintings survive, he was prolific in drawing and writing. Some of his sketches are considered caricatures—interpretations, but also representative designs.



Figure 54: Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, 1505-07

And there are other, less famous, sources for the Rorschach test. Another possible origin is a series of poems composed by Justinus Kerner in 1857, based on an accidental inkblot. Also, Alfred Binet, a French psychologist, is known to have employed inkblots for assessing creativity and imagination in some of his patients. And the inkblot test has been associated with Blotto—a late 19th century game. The concept of the test design was derived from the Swiss psychologist's 1921 book, *Psychodiagnostik* in which Rorschach recounted his studies of 300 patients and 100 control subjects. In those studies, he utilized the ten key inkblot designs he had selected from the several hundreds he considered. He used the test to help in diagnosing his mental patients. Due to his difficulty in securing a publisher, the book was published posthumously in 1927.

Reading Rorschach

The seeming simplicity of the two forms—inkblots and silhouettes—is deceptive, in that the content they contain can be quite complex. For example, Shaw likens the silhouette to the literary genre of poetry, and refers specifically to the symmetry of image in its composition and the fact that the image echoes. Therefore, according to her, “visually it rhymes” (61). Moreover, the forms are also poetic in the sense of using other “literary” devices, such as metaphor, simile, hyperbole, and even rhythm. “You have to find a rhythm,” Walker tells Belcove about the drawing process that leads to her silhouette cuttings (6). A sense of tempo or cadence is also reflected in the images. Both forms require reading of content, color, shape, and form, as well as of blank space.



Figure 55: Three of the Ten Inkblots Used in Rorschach Testing

Analyzing Rorschach, like viewing silhouette, is a process of reading the lines as well as reading between them. In evaluating Rorschach, attention to form is the most significant determinant of a participant's response, and is thought to provide the greatest insight into the intellectual capacity of respondents. Conversely, focus on color provides more direct clarity on the emotional lives of those responding to the inkblots. Other variables include awareness of "movement" of the forms, and "shading"—which was arbitrarily introduced to the testing process because of a printing error in which the inkblot images bled and were blurred on the page. An intricate and often refuted scoring process is used to interpret the data. Ideation—the creation of new ideas by viewers—is an important and measurable aspect of the responses.

Analysis of testing data can be telling. In "The Rorschach Chronicles," Margaret Talbot describes modern personality testing—from "artsy interpretative exercises" like inkblots to more cumbersome questionnaires like the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (M.M.P.I.)—as "a child of 20th-century research psychology, born of the dream that we can crack the code of human behavior if only we can devise the right set of questions." Linking with phrenology and physiognomy, she adds, "Long before scientific testing, we tried to classify temperament and character based on the shapes of people's skulls or the color of their humors." These tests, she explains, grew up with the help of modern bureaucracies like corporations and the military, based upon their needs for an efficient means to categorize people by temperament, and to identify suitable workplace *types* like the "team player" and the "company man." Psychologists have been eager to accommodate requests for these media, Talbot writes, because "it has allowed them to indulge in a fantasy of their own: that personality assessment may someday attain the authority and respect of more objective medical tests, helping, in turn, to endow psychology with some of the status of the hard sciences."

Subject to high interpretability, such testing can—in the wrong hands—become hegemonic tools. Although test developers and administrators seek the imprimatur of hard science—borrowing, for example, medical nomenclature, such as claiming that test results provide “an X-ray” of the inner self—there is in fact a high margin of error. Specifically, personality tests share much in common with intelligence testing—namely their dependence upon “norming” with an alleged “optimal self” based upon a biased, but seemingly objective standard. According to Robert Bornstein, “Until relatively recently, personality tests were not very sympathetic to cultural and subcultural differences.... on the M.M.P.I., for example, members of minority and ethnic religious groups have tended to look disproportionately pathological” (qtd. in Talbot). In addition, as Talbot explains, some personality tests “bear the unmistakable stamp of one particular psychological theory.” Her best example is “The Adventures of Blacky”:

Blacky is a puppy of indeterminate breed and sex, though almost everyone seems to assume he's a boy. His "adventures" are of the most transparently and obligingly Freudian variety. Oedipal Blacky comes upon his father and mother holding paws and gazing amorously at each other (mama dog is troublingly drawn with humanlike bow lips). He bares his teeth and snarls. Oral-stage Blacky suckles happily at mama dog's teats. Sibling-rivalrous Blacky fantasizes a butcher knife winging straight for his blindfolded sister, Tippy. The Blacky pictures were first published in 1950, and like certain cinematic images of the couch and the sagacious, bearded analyst, they are emblems of the golden age of American psychoanalysis so pure as to evoke nostalgia in all but the most hardened Freud bashers.

Aside from catering to specific social and cultural biases and advancing particular psychological agendas, another drawback of these tests is that they promote prejudicial beliefs which can lead to discriminatory actions. “Remember all that,” Bornstein warns, “the next time some test administrator tells you that what you're about to submit to is just like an X-ray—or, as they're starting to say now, like an emotional M.R.I. Remember that human personality can't be subjugated to the tyranny of types, the logic of a questionnaire, the promise of instant self-knowledge” (qtd. in Talbot).

Refuting Rorschach

As a professor of psychology at Gettysburg College, Bornstein's warning perhaps makes Walker's point exactly—don't *buy the hype* of believing that signs equate to substance. Even though she uses the forms of signs—blackface and the silhouette—Walker is committed to disproving the staid symbolisms they contain. Her work “comprises a laundry list of dynamic oppositional entanglements, between black and white, obviously, but also between violence and pleasure, death and birth, orality and anality, documentation and fantasy, art and nonart, seeing and imagining, and so on” (English 74-75). Her aim is to disrupt, to fracture, and to allow the reader to participate in his or her own re-assembly. She achieves this through a Barthesian *punctum* that can catalyze viewers into self-examination and mutual acts of *communitas*. Her work is “extremely seductive. You're attracted to it, and then, as Kara has told me more than once, 'I punch you either in the stomach or the face.' She acts like a historian who's telling you a history you do not want to hear” (Belcove 2)



Figure 56: Excerpt of a “Rorschached” Negress from *The Renaissance Society*, 1997

In signifying on stereotypes—in operating as critique of derogatory racial profiling—the silhouette performs its own counter-argument. Yet, more pointedly, Walker’s art “renders the inner plantation as a way to imagine black American historical culture more complexly” (English 97). English elaborates,

By using, like filters, forms that openly display the contrivances of authorial desire, Walker’s tableaux redraw the route from here to slavery as hopelessly diverted in respect to its endpoint. They mark as their principal field of action a middle ground where one can enter a relationship with the past only by forging one. This middle ground diagrams, if melodramatically, a kind of truth that hereditary histories cannot take on board without collapse—histories are by nature determining. There is no source back to the plantation untouched by ‘outside’ efforts to motivate our conceptualization of that place by settling the terms of arrival in advance. (115)



Figure 57: *African American*, Kara Walker, 1998

Moreover, according to English, Walker demonstrates that there is a unique—if perverse—appreciation of free will and independence that she is eliciting through her praxes of binding content to form in the panoramic tableaux.

So unmoored, the vignettes enjoy a kind of freedom to find their own means of contextualization. These we supply in electing to make use of Walker's handiwork, which in itself means no more or less than what it becomes in our varied (and one hopes, varying) arguments about its utility. (132)

The viewer's power lies in the fact that "we may supply *these scenes* with their terms of use, instead of having them supplied for us"(132). Furthermore, English explains,

...it should be clear that Walker's art is unrestrainedly, even aggressively, engaged with the fantastic. The notion that her work is sourced in an 'inner plantation' most clearly states it is internally motivated, justified by and devoted to a purely ideational and philosophical end, albeit one with real implications for a sizable proportion of its viewers. (135)

A notion that Walker's art is self-serving draws its most forceful opposition. But a counterview suggests that she is only the messenger, and therefore a convenient target for some misdirected anger and frustration by her critics. Their angst is rooted in the same systemic racism that Walker has been, and may in some regards still be, subject to. "Some critics have described her art as more about the artist's psychology than about her ideology. Walker, wrapping her arms together for emphasis, says the personal and political 'come together in points of profundity, excitement, catharsis'" (Belcove 4).



Figure 58: Photo-Portrait of the Artist Kara Walker in Front of Her Art

CHAPTER FIVE

PEDAGOGY OF THE PROFILE: SPEAKING RACE, TEACHING SILHOUETTE

Black and White and Seeing Red



Figure 59: Kara Walker, *A Work on Progress*, 1998

In the 1920's, when W.E.B. DuBois wrote in *The Souls of Black Folk* that "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line," one wonders: *did he foresee this problem persisting into the twenty-first?* Perhaps not, but based upon recent events, attempts by liberals and other well-meaning Americans to minimize or to sweep the issue of race under the colloquial carpet are becoming less and less successful. The futility of a post-race rhetorical paradigm is ever more apparent, as conveyed in the recent *New York Times* editorial, "Whose Country Is It?" by Op-Ed columnist Charles M. Blow. There, Blow highlights the increase in racial intolerance in the new millennium. Observing particularly the pandemonium surrounding the March 2010 passage of the President's controversial Healthcare Reform Bill, Blow alludes to prior speculation by mainly Republican pundits that the bill was virtually dead-on-arrival in Congress and that the watershed event would deal a paralyzing "blow" to Obama's administration.

Instead, to the surprise of many, and to the dismay of others, the bill prevailed, and a wave of dissent swept the nation, prompting Blow to observe in chiding tones:

The far-right extremists have gone into conniptions. The bullying, threats, and acts of violence following the passage of health care reform have been shocking, but they're only the most recent manifestations of an increasing sense of desperation. It's an extension of a now-familiar theme: some version of "take our country back." The problem is that the country romanticized by the far right hasn't existed for some time, and its ability to deny that fact grows more dim every day. President Obama and what he represents has jolted extremists into the present and forced them to confront the future. And it scares them.... It's enough to make a good old boy go crazy. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/27/opinion/27blow.html?emc=eta1>)

And thank God for 2010, because even on a bad day, such as the day the Healthcare Bill passed, Blow can joke about a "good old boy" on the pages of *The Times* with at least a reasonable expectation of safety. That has not always been the case for a black man in America; and that time may in fact be passing over, if recent events are any indication. All jokes aside, the racial undercurrent in the country is increasingly toxic and volatile.

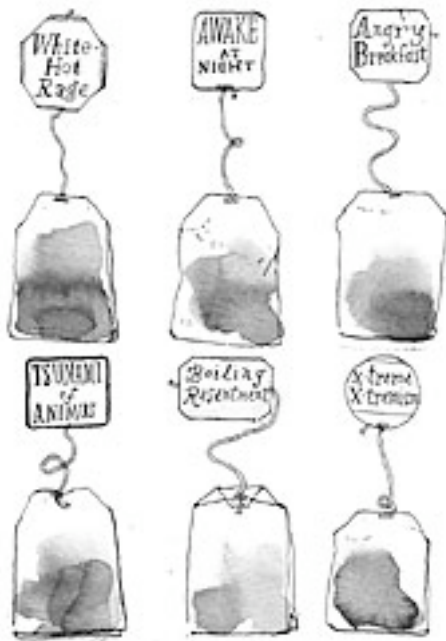


Figure 60: Barry Blitt Drawing, nytimes.com, March 27, 2010

"...the laughs," Frank Rich writes, "evaporated soon enough. There's nothing entertaining about watching goons hurl venomous slurs at congressmen like the civil rights hero John Lewis and the openly gay Barney Frank. And as the week dragged on, and reports of death threats and vandalism stretched from Arizona to Kansas to upstate New York, the F.B.I. and the local police had to get into the act to protect members of Congress and their families." ("Rage")

In a sense, then, given the present cultural climate, examining the rhetoric of race is a timely endeavor that has never been more of an urgent cause than now, when the issue of race is both front and center in American politics, yet remains persistently veiled in public discourse. Much is at stake given the social, political, and economic gains that have been made in the nation, and the risks of allowing race relations to regress, rather than advance. A long-running economic crisis bordering on a Depression has produced a financial environment stymied by unemployment, a thwarted housing market, tightened access to credit, and businesses and families that have been physically and emotionally displaced. As typical, distrust has peaked under such tenuous conditions.

That the President has become a central locus for the pent-up frustrations of his policy and party detractors, as well as some social and racial malcontents, does little to encourage open dialogue between a divided electorate. The GOP has opposed Obama at nearly every turn, even going so far as to back-peddle on its own policies in its principled position of undermining his agenda. Having earned the reputation of being “The Party of No,” the Republicans have used threats of the November 2010 elections to instill fear and disunity among Democrats, to some success. Not particularly known for strength of conviction, Democrats have felt the pressure of GOP opposition, and some factions have begun buckling, while the Republican wing has held firm and unrelenting. A jobs bill and education reform are also now pending legislation and enactment, and charges of racism on both sides have begun to surface. Republicans claim that Obama is intent upon a “redistribution of wealth” because of his commitment to healthcare access and the funding of public and charter schools—legislation that they believe would disproportionately benefit blacks who have been most affected by poor school systems and rising unemployment. On the other hand, the Congressional Black Caucus has expressed dissatisfaction that the process is moving too slowly and is not well focused.

All Hands on Deck

As a nation, we continue to be haunted by our history—one which is very proud and admirable in many respects (that we are a nation of immigrants who have produced the largest democracy in the world, among others)—but one which is shameful and repellant in others (that slavery was at one point the primary industry for the South, and that its legacy continues to loom large). While we are all Americans, there remain divisions based upon skin color, ethnicity, economic class, and other factors. In these regards, we seem to never get past our past. Most telling and troubling of all the issues associated with race today is the seeming stagnancy of the circumstances: the subjection of blacks to negative racial classification, and the persistent denial by whites of any racial identity, and a priori lack of accountability. It seems the more things change...

From perhaps the most cynical perspective, it can be claimed that those who hope to make all of the people happy, all of the time, are fairly doomed to make none of the people happy, none of the time. President Obama has continually expressed a desire for bipartisanship, even in the face of staunch GOP rebuff and rejection. Republicans, on the other hand, claim that Obama has deliberately left them out of the decision-making process, and that they will therefore continue to oppose him every step of the way. As the preeminent potential race spokesman in the country, the President appears to be taking the moral high ground by avoiding any entanglement in racial discourse. He insists that he is not the “President of Black America,” but that he is the President of the United States of America. The problem, however, is that there is simply not much unity to be found. What then can the *manirhetorical* silhouette contribute to an agenda in which President Obama’s plan for the country is to have “a rising tide lift all boats”? How can silhouette, which has historically been used to build dams, now be employed to build bridges and get these boats from being landlocked and into the water?

Rhetoric(s) to the Rescue?

Writing about the popular 2005 film, *Crash*, in the journal *College English*, Joyce Irene Middleton responds to the director Paul Haggis' goal to initiate serious dialogue on race. In contextualizing the film's value for educators, Middleton credits Toni Morrison with having begun a similar conversation years earlier by providing a rhetorical template for whiteness scholars with the publication of *Playing in the Dark* in 1990. Middleton refers to the sometime difficulty of getting university students to participate in race-talk, and quotes film critic Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, who writes,

Invoke the word *race* and you invoke, for most listeners, images of the 'nonwhite other.' In my daily life as a 'white' professor, I teach predominately 'white' students. Confronted with topics about race, most of my students opt out of the discussion, as if they have no race, no ethnicity, and no investment in the stakes of race as social discourse.... (329)

Having helped to produce a film that is not just a pop culture vehicle (pun intended) but also a study in racial profiling—Haggis, in cinema, joins countless others in academia and politics who are taking part in difficult and uncomfortable conversations about race.

For example, at the 2000 Northeastern Modern Language Association (NEMLA) Conference, a group of scholars convened in a roundtable discussion on the emerging field of Whiteness Studies. Avy Trager, one of the participants, had this to say:

Whiteness Studies can also give us a way of controlling through knowledge, allowing us to become self-anointed arbiters of equality, providing a measurable discourse with which we judge others and with which we can protect ourselves. I know that I have anxiously participated in sincere considerations of whether one should say "African-American" or "black," or "Native-American" versus "American-Indian," as if the mastery of these terms offered a mastery of one's cultural world. As a white woman, I know these terms have not altered my position. Rather, they have granted me an easier whiteness. (136)

As Trager, points out—and as Flannery O'Connor shows in her fiction—with the use of terms like "nigger" and "white trash"—semantics do matter when it comes to racial discourse. And it is not just filmmakers or those connected to Whiteness Studies programs that stand to gain from such analysis of race-as-social-discourse.

“Identity”—and the social, cultural, and political capital it accrues—has proven to be as valuable a commodity not only within political institutions, and within educational settings, but in society at large. “Identity” permeates nearly every aspect of life—in that it shapes and molds experience. It entails race, gender, culture, social class, ethnic and religious affiliation, economic status, educational attainment, profession, and sundry other variables. A large part of the educational mission—even, perhaps especially, when it is not articulated as such—is taken up with the formation of identity as preparation for work, professionalism, civic responsibility, and domestic and family life. Yet, relatively little academic curricula address issues of individual character and personality. Theme-based learning, however, can be put to that use. And race rhetoric is one such unspoken theme. As just one instance of this, the phenomenon of *whiteness*, as generic identity, as trope of power and dominance, as racialized *otherness*, is a subject worthy and demanding of not just a conversation, but of careful and meticulous study.

Such investigations have particular application in various Across-the-University programs and other inter- and transdisciplinary curricula. More and more, such thematic approaches to teaching and learning are permeating classrooms. In “American Origins of the Writing-across-the-Curriculum Movement,” David R. Russell situates WAC within a context of the “multiversity”—a variation upon the original unified design of the academy, *pre-ethnicity*, *pre-culture*, and *pre-academic* units. Given the large numbers of European immigrants arriving in America during the 1700’s and 1800’s, there was no *absence* of ethnic or cultural plurality in academia. Because of this pluralism, and in pursuit of “a more perfect union,” early university instruction functioned to constrain cultural differences, and to mainstream students into American-ness—more particularly into *whiteness*—orienting across national allegiances, and later structured academic disciplines, into systems of academic caste, and into racial privilege.

Integration of public schools following the landmark case of Brown versus the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas in 1954—and the Civil Rights Movement of the late 1950's and early 1960's—sought to address aspirations of assimilation and adaptation, but led instead to deep divisions in the academy. Standardized and IQ testing were used to norm and separate students according to perceived capabilities, leading to academic “tracking”—often to the detriment of minority students who lacked basic preparation, and who needed remediation in order to compete fairly in the system. Affirmative Action offered some redress for that lack. The last quarter of the 20th century saw education reform and a return to a more holistic and foundational approach to learning. Yet, even with education reform, broaching the topos of race has not been prioritized in academic settings, and has been shunned in mainstream political arenas in which funding and districting decisions about public educations are often made.

Theorists such as Paulo Freire and Edward Said have discussed alternative approaches to learning from “Other” perspectives—contrasting the educational opportunities of those outside “dominant” discourse with that of those secured within it—for purposes of sensitizing members of prevailing groups, and to empower “others.” In higher education, the “multiversity”—which is gaining popularity abroad in countries like India and the UK, offers students a variety of courses, covering a wide range of fields that are not strictly bound to rigid disciplinary units. Likewise, Victor Villanueva has referenced the deferred possibilities for a “megaversity.” And Diana George recommends developing “multiliteracies” as an antidote to academic homogeneity and staid teaching praxes. Race scholar Middleton is exemplary of this broad-based approach to pedagogy in her capacity as an Associate Professor of English at East Carolina University whose research includes the History of Rhetoric, Cultural Studies, Film, Feminism, and African American Literature.

The silhouette can be an effective trope for examining rhetorical mechanisms of identity studies, such as *whiteness*. At the 2000 NEMLA Conference, Trager added,

Whiteness is usefully inexpressible. It does not easily yield to a comfortable terminology or offer us the promise of expertise. It resists being known, volunteering only indefinite form. This nebulousness is what I believe makes whiteness a valuable area to study. The pursuit of whiteness is, and must remain, unformulated. We benefit from its insistence on process. The danger of our work is that it can give us the sense that we know what whiteness is, that we've located its absolute source and its character. Whiteness Studies can give us a way of constructing a narrative that offers a sense of closure. (135)

Trager is seconded in her premise that whiteness is an arbitrary signifier worthy of academic examination. In "The Dominant Ethnic Moment," Eric Kaufmann, Reader in Politics and Sociology at the Birkbeck College of the University of London, writes, "If white Americans could only understand that they are wearing the Emperor's New Clothes, they would wake up from their hegemonic stupor. Notice that the White Studies argument turns on the notion that whiteness is a free-floating text. If only things were so simple" (Kaufmann 237). But things are never simple when it comes to race.

In "White Means Never Having to Say You're Ethnic," Pamela Perry explains "the perniciousness of whiteness as it hides in literature, art and popular culture...work and educational institutional structures... pedagogy...the law and property rights...the values and identities of whites in the historical past...and the historical present" (60). By her account, "...whiteness scholarship cannot be reduced to any small set of theoretical currents, but it may be safe to say that it has been preeminently concerned with exposing the ways white domination is sustained and reproduced in invisible ways (59). *Whiteness* as a default is both essentialist and essentializing. It is a paradigm that obscures the cultural and ethnic differences of whites, while it shines a blinding and indicting light upon that same category of characteristics in others. It assumes a fixed stability where none exists, and uses that position as a source of privilege and impunity. Such willful lack of self-reflection has resulted in hegemonic practice, in systemic racism.

Perry echoes Morrison's views on whiteness when she refers to the subliminal aspects of whiteness and norming. Whiteness scholar Ashley Doane adds to this caution:

... examination of popular discourse uncovers both a sobering reality and a challenge for progressive and antiracist sociologists. While academics and other intellectuals have developed increasingly nuanced understandings of racism, it appears that academic discourse is relatively marginal to the popular understanding of racial issues. Recasting what constitutes racism has become a powerful weapon in the arsenal of those who oppose the movement toward racial justice and who are willing to accept (and benefit from) the status quo. At the same time, the persistence of a "structural racism" counterideology.... Suggests that academic work can have an influence. If this evolution of racial discourse is to be challenged, then antiracist academics must challenge color-blind racial ideology not only in the classroom, but also in community forums and in the popular media. Without such challenges, the ideological underpinnings of American racism will become stronger and the struggle for racial justice will become immeasurably more difficult. (271)

According to Trager, those who enjoy the privilege of whiteness must concede its costs:

The question becomes, then, how do we disclose whiteness, how do we explain what it is while keeping the subject open, unsettling and unsettled. In other words, my goal is not to resolve the uncertainty of whiteness, but to encourage the perpetual disruption of our apparent resolutions. Whiteness is, after all, not only what we say it is, whiteness is also the **need** to say what whiteness is. (136)

Manirhetorics of Silhouette

As university demographics continue to evolve as a result of the various dynamics of politics, a weak economy, and technological developments—even the international events of war and terrorism are affecting academics—universities must respond to the needs and demands of their various constituencies. Innovations in “distance” and online offerings signal the university’s adaptability to change. More pointedly for this study, however, insight into the effects of multicultural instruction and communication issues must be considered for their potentially far-reaching implications upon university curricula. Such teaching methodologies can be applicable throughout the academy—particularly as immigration continues apace, and as cultural and ethnic diversities come to be recognized as the rule, rather than the exceptions.

Theme-based teaching and learning can facilitate “identity” studies in multicultural and diverse academic settings—the new “norm.” Such strategies are being embraced in widespread programs focused on Writing-across-the-Curriculum (featuring incorporation of writing-intensive courses and other mechanisms for learning-to-write); Communication-across-the-Curriculum (building on the use of technologies to develop communications literacies); and Writing-in-the-Disciplines (incorporating writing objectives and other writing-to-learn activities into traditionally content-only courses).

The *manirhetorical* trope of silhouette would serve especially well in the open-concept “multiversity-learning” model of instruction, in that it is not limited to any particular discipline or genre. By crossing boundaries of race, class, and ethnicity, the trope of the silhouette can be valuable for addressing issues of *liminality* and juxtaposition. It can be used to counter rhetorical devices—like, ironically, the silhouette—that have functioned to profile others—to inculcate and reinscribe racial and ethnic values and identities. The *medium* is also a *means* for examining how and when rhetorics suppress cultural specificity—how and when group norming occurs—as well as when it uses such cultural markers as straitjackets for conscripting identities.

Manirhetorics stand at the forefront of dialectic—the type of conundrum Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel has characterized as the process of melding the seemingly apparent contradictions of thesis and antithesis into a “higher truth” which he called “synthesis.” Achieving synthesis in the academy can ameliorate challenges surrounding identity, and the arts of rhetorics can serve these purposes. The author/artist’s role in the production of silhouette can embody such a synthesis in art—although not without much debate. Moreover, this debate is deeply rooted, and as ancient as Aristotle—whose theory of “poetic correctness” invokes the author’s aesthetics, and possibly other motivations (such as character), as variables for receiving and interpreting the work.

Arts of *Manirhetorics*

In his *Poetics*, Aristotle suggests that the “means” of art—which can refer to at least three of the five canons of rhetoric—its invention, its arrangement, and its style—may be justified by the “end” of art, which can refer to the other two canons—its style as well as its delivery—so long as the standard of “art” is attained. Throughout the *Poetics*, Aristotle sets a high bar for this standard, and his use of fairly mechanical terms such as “means” and “ends” to refer to art might seem to suggest a factory assembly line. Yet, he is a thinker of a far subtler imagination. In his *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle further refines his discussion of means and ends by referring to *arête*, a search for truth, virtue, and excellence. He acknowledges that this search is necessarily one of relativity, “a kind of moderation,” and that it is therefore important to weigh the various elements that make up a work of art. The artist, Aristotle suggests, is principal in this system of weights and measures. Tediousness and buffoonery are two of the poles of extremity Aristotle warns the artist against, while wit would represent the mean—the excellent.

Aristotle is also central to an understanding of the *manirhetorics* of silhouette, which can be used to create, embody, as well as to critique artistic representations of culture and ethnicity. His works with physiognomy and taxonomy are instructive in identifying some of the roots of racial and ethnic profiling, and the “poetry” used to convey them. Aristotle is taken up in his philosophical debate on the author/artist’s role by literary critics such as Roland Barthes—whose essay “Death of the Author” in *Image, Music, Text*—seeks to clearly sound the death knell for contemporary artists. In positing the text as alienated from its message—as alienated, in fact, from all messages—he attempts to free the author from entanglement with the work, fairly immunizing him or her from either praise or blame. Likewise, his dismissal of the author also immunizes the work from any real social or political accountability, or potential impact.

In suggesting that writing is “the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin” Barthes situates art in the nether regions, beyond critical accessibility (142). Rather, he purports, it is language itself which is evaluable, translatable through signs and symbols—many of which, by his own account, are vague and ambiguous. Still, Barthes insists, it is the raw substance and materials of the work which merit our attention, not the esoterica of meaning, and certainly not the maker. Barthes’s theory signals the literal *denouement* of art. He writes, “we know that to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth [the author]: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author” (148). And while “other” philosophers, such as W.E.B. DuBois and Alain Locke, have urged artists to politicize their arts, in her *Collected Letters*, Flannery O’Connor expresses similar caveats to Barthes’ on the author’s minimized role. It is also significant that while O’Connor’s art evokes politics in its search for truth and meaning, she defers to group, rather than individual, identity to explain its making.

Aristotle’s major contribution in understanding rhetoric, according to James Murphy in “The Metarhetoric of Aristotle, with Some Examples from His *On Memory and Recollection*,” is his “holistic” approach, encompassing the wide array of variables that impact communications. Among these, he includes the three components of persuasion: pathos/ethos/and logos, as well as the five canons of rhetoric: invention, arrangement, style, memorization, and delivery. In addition to these elements of rhetoric, Murphy highlights Aristotle’s attention to *phronesis*, which he calls a “practical wisdom.” The topoi—the commonplaces—are examples of this practical approach to rhetoric in that they allow rhetors to represent knowledge in symbols and images which are appropriate and easily accessible to specific audiences (219). Silhouette is a trope which meets those requirements for “common knowledge” and “common sense.” At the same time, it affords the production of new and unfamiliar ways of thinking.

Teaching Race, Speaking Silhouette

At the same time, race is a topos that is aptly accommodated through the *manirhetorical* trope of the silhouette. This is true even though sometimes, as Barthes has written, "...It is not answering which is difficult, it is questioning" (*Critical* 203). And the reluctance to address racial issues well illustrates this point. Edward Tufte, of graphic arts fame, has said that the task of art is to "express the inexpressible." In so remarking, he echoes the sentiments of artists who, in turn, use the silhouette to "speak the unspeakable" (Morrison, "Unspeakable" 3); "see the unspeakable" (Shaw 36); and practice "distortion, not abstraction" (O'Connor, *Habit* 115). These juxtapositions of de-familiarizing the familiar, of re-visioning, or re-contextualizing, both signify and articulate a new way of entering into and understanding the discourse on race. The quality of being "unspeakable" appears to defy description, visualization, and articulation. Yet, that is what the *manirhetorics* of silhouette have the potential to do.

In this study, "the unspeakable" refers to the horrors of chattel slavery in America and its racial—and too often racist—aftermath. Demonstrating that the varied configurations of the *manirhetorical* trope of the silhouette—the literary, visual, even oral aspects—are well suited to speak to the racial quagmire in this country encapsulates such analysis of racial and cultural rhetorics. *Manirhetorics* of silhouette is a viable tool and method for conducting this academic inquiry on race because of its complexity and inherent copiousness—another homage to Aristotle. Its layered richness offers a depth and breadth of understanding which the field of race rhetoric encompasses and calls forth. Utilizing *manirhetorical* analysis as a methodology for informing the work of selected artists provides entrée into racial dialogue, as the artists in this study have done in their own inimitable ways. There can be artistry in the most commonplaces of language, and many routes can be taken in the analysis of rhetoric.

Yet, a *manirhetorical* approach can be most effective in advancing the premise that the artist/rhetor's self-reflexivity in relation to his craft can immensely—though not completely—inform the work. Further, drawing upon *manirhetorical* analysis to illuminate the trope of the silhouette can solidify (and to some extent continue the re-appropriation of) its standing in the commonplace—however reluctant—of racial discourse. The manifold schema of the silhouette or cutout is a model metaphor for race relations, with their inherent boundaries of interiority and externality, darkness and lightness, back and foregrounding, profiling and outlining. Each of these artistic principles and maneuvers applies proportionately to the interactions between races, cultures, and ethnicities—even classes. Viewing the trope of the silhouette as one with manifold applications, operating on multiple levels, and able to accomplish various rhetorical goals—as one that is in fact already meta-rhetorical, already a commentary on commentary—can provide ample research and publication opportunities based on readings and interpretations—a testament to its suitability for broaching race-talk.

There may, in fact, be no better analogy for confronting the lingering vestiges of American slavery than the *manirhetorical* silhouette. In exploring the works of Flannery O'Connor and Kara Walker through letters, interviews, essays, public talks, and the like, a narrative of race and race rhetoric has been developed which, though palatable, will undoubtedly leave a bit of an aftertaste in the mouths of readers. The "racial profiles" these artists have produced through their fiction and cutout panoramas have made, and continue to make, indelible marks in American arts, judging from their numerous prizes and accolades, including Guggenheim, Kenyon, and MacArthur awards. So there is definitely extensive interest in the themes they explore. Notwithstanding its turn through the shady corridors of racial discrimination (a la Lavater), the form is rooted in folk culture and therefore carries the imprimatur of a commonsense commonplace.

In contemplating ways to bring the rhetorics of the silhouette into the classroom, there are numerous possibilities. Presently, the form has no real presence in academic curricula, in spite its pervasiveness in society at large. As a rhetorical medium, or container, the silhouette pertains not only to paper cutouts and profile portraits, but also to caricature, literary parody, satire, irony, and drama. Yet heretofore, transdisciplinary venues have not been made available to afford the synthesis of these varied components. Adding the component of race further complicates the equation. Specifically, the field of race rhetoric is not widely recognized as such. There are at present courses in Black History, Black Literature, Black Psychology, and the like. But here again, the rhetorics of race cross any and all of those disciplinary borders. Moreover, titling a course “Black this” or “Black that” is a misnomer for the content such a course requires. The concept and substance of race pertains not just to blackness and whiteness, and not just to Black or White Studies. Race is a far bigger animal than such conscriptions can accommodate.

And even getting beyond the rather logistical uncertainties about where to house such a course and what to name it, there is cause for rather grave concerns about the audience for it, and its placement and “hierarchy” in academic programs. As Trager and others have noted, the subject of race is not a popular one in university classrooms, no matter the make-up of the student body—whether at the HBCU (historically Black college or university) or the PDI “predominantly dominant—or white—institution”). The subject and substance of race make many—if not most—Americans, and not just students, uncomfortable. Because race is not front and center in public policy matters or public discussions, and because many students have grown up in a “racially tolerant” or post-race culture, they feel that race, if it ever was a problem, has been solved, and that talking only makes matters worse. Consequently, the underlying assumption is most often that race is an issue best left unspoken—even if it is not out of sight or mind.

Particularly in undergraduate programs, students are more inclined to favor subjects and courses which they feel are practical and goal-directed. Most General Studies courses, they believe, are not. So there is an almost immediate resistance to tackling such philosophical, even metaphysical, concepts as race. Therefore if race is featured prominently in the title or course description—unless it is a required course, a condition which may cause its own backlash—it is doubtful as to whether students would even register for it. And if the course is not billed as being directly about race, students are likely to later feel ambushed, and shy away from dealing with it head-on.

A potential course would, like Walker's work, incorporate some of the familiar tropes and images of racial discourse—such as burning crosses, and use of the n-word, to serve as touchstones for the audience. And as with Walker's art, it would be informative to juxtapose "racist" images—symbols of nooses and the trope of blackface—into required communications courses to generate discussion and provoke students to think beyond their own immediate views and experiences. Having no firm ground beneath them—recognizing, in other words, that there is no one "right" answer—students might feel destabilized. They will need to be reassured that the dialogue has value. They may have unpredictable reactions to being pushed so far out of their comfort zones. But discomfort has always been associated with growing pains.

And then there is the question of administrative support for such a course. Grades are of primary concern to students. By and large, they do not bear ambiguity well, and they may have legitimate concerns about how they are being evaluated and assessed. Curricula of this nature lend themselves to great subjectivity, and without a clear rubric to follow, or other quantitative measures, there could certainly be a high margin for error. There are many questions and concerns as to how administration officials might mediate between faculty and students as per such subjective matters.

Across-the-Curriculum and other inter- and transdisciplinary programs are the wave of the academic future, and it is there that guidance and models for teaching *manirhetorics* of silhouette can be found. Rather than developing a single course to encompass the breadth and depth of silhouette, such instruction could facilitate and require building coalition among faculty and administrators. This would also entail a shift in paradigm towards bringing race and rhetorics into the mainstream of academia, rather than “ghetto-izing” them by relegating these subjects, and their attendant issues, to isolated corridors within select departments. A first and necessary step would be “educating the educators” as to merits of such instruction through faculty development opportunities, campus workshops, and research sabbaticals. These activities would, in short order, likely pay dividends with the advancement of research presentations and publications, as well as additions to university curricula. Reaching university citizens where they are is a common-sense strategy when seeking to make cultural change, and faculty and administrators who are familiar with the WAC/WID movement can well attest. Change is necessarily gradual, with faculty support built from the ground up.

The Final Cut

Thus, in drawing upon *manirhetorical* analysis to illuminate the trope of the silhouette, it is possible to solidify its standing in the commonplace of racial discourse. As an exemplary model of this praxis, the works of Flannery O’Connor include numerous references to the post-Civil Rights changes she witnessed taking place in what she called the “Christ-haunted South.” She was struck by, and reflected in her writing the oddities of Bible Belt culture. O’Connor ascribed to, and articulated, a strong sense of group identity with antebellum culture, and she produced literary works that reflect those oft-times racist views. Her use of literary caricature is a form of racial profiling. Her characterizations/ caricatures of racial types are both humorous and unnerving.

O'Connor insists that her works are not naturalistic—not realistic in any expected sense of the term. Neither, she admonishes, is her work abstract. "Distortion" is the term she prefers, signaling her self-conscious use of "coloring" as social commentary on her subjects, whether white, "nigger," or "idiot." Colorful characters inhabit her writing, both fictional and non-fictional. Her methods of racial profiling as forms of silhouette are stinging and insightful. The Southern grotesque was her style of writing. In addition, she was aware of black artistic responses to the Civil Rights movement, most notably the works of James Baldwin—of which she strongly disapproved. She felt that it would take more time for a true black aesthetic to evolve.

Kara Walker is an example of a new black aesthetic—the *hyperblack*. She was born into an artistic family which was also racially neutral. Her own racial and feminist consciousnesses were not fully awakened until years later, when she experienced a racial-coming-of-age and found her way to silhouette as an ethnic right-of-passage. Walker has written extensively about her motivations for exploiting the form of the silhouette in its various configurations. She has said she wants to explode the myth of the innocence or "sentimentality" of the trope. Her use of the form exposes its "shadier" side, and ventures into the murky territory of stereotypes and visual racial slurs and hiccups. Racial rhetorical Rorschach tests is one way Walker's works can be categorized. In viewing Walker's race-scapes, the viewer's interpretation often says more about the viewer than about the art. This is by Walker's ingenious design. Moreover, the allegory of the silhouette as litmus test for racial tolerance is quite fitting for Walker's project.

In their way, both artists want audiences to face their own racial countenances. The very aim of race iconography is representational, a quality which readily lends itself to evaluation and elucidation. Perception plays a huge role in the reception of these works, and ideology shows through. O'Connor and Walker both know and show this.

Research on this *manirhetorical* trope of silhouette can be used as part of larger studies in inter-cultural communications and collaborative instruction methodologies. Similar analyses can be conducted with the works of various literary and visual artists, philosophers, and linguists, aligning them with the literary forms of silhouette alluded to in Nancy Forgiione's work. From its humble origin as wall painting to the many variations of black paper cutouts, and "racial profiling" in fiction, there have been many twists and turns in the development of this form. Associations with the "hard" sciences of biology, anatomy, taxonomy, psychiatry, and psychology, and the "soft" sciences of physiognomy and phrenology—as well as the literary genres of caricature, parody, and satire, the plastic arts of drawing, painting, black paper cutouts, and collage—make the silhouette a prime medium for representing the fault lines in race relations.



Figure 61: Kara Walker, *Emancipation Approximation*, 2000

Works Cited

- Ackerman, Marion. "Kara Walker—Snared by form." *Kara Walker*. London: Deutsche Bank, 2002.
- Als, Hilton. "The Shadow Act: Kara Walker's Vision." *New Yorker* 8 Oct. 2007: 70-79.
- Amor, Monica, Okwui Enwezor, Gao Minglu, et al. "Liminalities: Discussions on the Global and the Local." *Art Journal* 57. 4 (1998): 28-49.
- Anderson, Sherwood. "The Book of the Grotesque." *Winesburg, Ohio*.
http://www.PageByPageBooks.com/Sherwood_Anderson/Winesburg_Ohio/THE_BOOK_OF_THE_GROTESQUE_p2.html.
- Aristotle. "Of Physiognomy, Showing What it is, and From Whence it is Derived."
<<http://www.exclassics.com/arist/arist62.htm>.
- . "Of the Judgment of Physiognomy."
<<http://www.exclassics.com/arist/arist63.htm>.
- . "Prior Analytics." *The Works of Aristotle*. Trans. W. D. Ross. Oxford: Clarendon, 1908 <<http://graduate.gradsch.uga.edu/archive/Aristotle.html>.
- Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981.
- . *Critical Essays*. Trans. Richard Howard. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1972.
- . *Image, Music, Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.
- Belcove, Julie L. "History Girl: Kara Walker's Art Mines the Past to Tell a Very Different Story." *W Magazine* Mar. 2007:
http://www.wmagazine.com/artdesign/2007/03/kara_walker?printable=true
- Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: BBC, 1977.
- Blow, Charles M. "Black in the Age of Obama." *New York Times* online. 4 Dec. 2009:
http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/05/opinion/05blow.html?_r=1&emc=eta1.
- . "Whose Country Is It?" *New York Times Online*. 26 Mar. 2010:
<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/27/opinion/27blow.html?emc=eta1>.
- Blume, Harvey. "Q&A with Kara Walker." *The Boston Globe Online*. 2 Apr. 2006:
http://www.boston.com/news/globe/ideas/articles/2006/04/02/qa_with_kara_walker/
- Bobo, Lawrence. "What Do You Call a Black Man with a Ph.D.?" *The Root*. 22 July 2009: <<http://www.theroot.com/views/what-do-you-call-black-man-phd?page=0,1>.
- Bowles, John P. "Blinded by the White: Art and History at the Limits of Whiteness." *Art Journal* 60.4 (2001): 38-67.

- Boynton, Victoria, Karen J. Hall, Dian Killian, et al. "What's White Got to Do with It? Teaching Whiteness. Part II." *Modern Language Studies* 32.1 (2002): 133-173.
- Brier, Bob and A. H. Hobbs. *Daily Life of the Ancient Egyptians*. New York: Greenwood, 1999.
- Brilliant, Richard. "The Metonymous Face." *Social Research* 67.1 (2000): 25-46.
- Brooks, Tim. *Lost Sounds: Blacks and the Birth of the Recording Industry, 1890-1919*. Champaign: U of Illinois P, 2004: 174.
- Cooper, Helene. "Meet the New Elite, Not Like the Old." *New York Times* 26 Jul. 2009: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/26/weekinreview/26cooper.html?scp=1&sq=meet%20the%20new%20elite%20helene%20cooper&st=cse>
- Cotter, Holland. "The Glory that Was Greece From a Female Perspective." *Nyt.com*: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/19/arts/design/19wome.html?_r=1.
- Cunliffe, Leslie. "A Wittgensteinian Approach to Discerning the Meaning of Works of Art in Secondary Art Education." *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 40.1 (2006): 65-78.
- Deans, Bob. *The River Where America Began*. Lanham, Md: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007.
- Doane, Ashley. "What is Racism? Racial Discourse and Racial Politics." *Critical Sociology* 32 (2006): 255-274.
- Dominus, Susan. "Colorblind Conundrum For Bloomberg's Rival." *Big City. New York Times* 20 Oct. 2009, nat'l ed., sec. A: 25.
- Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. New York: Dover, 1995.
- . "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave (Written by Himself)." *Call and Response: The Riverside Anthology of the African American Literary Tradition*. Eds. Patricia Liggins Hill, et al. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998. 276-320.
- DuBois, William Edward Burghardt [W.E.B.]. "The Alain Locke-W.E.B. DuBois Debate on the Theory of Black Art." *Call and Response: The Riverside Anthology of the African American Literary Tradition*. Eds. Patricia Liggins Hill, et al. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998. 850-855.
- . "The Souls of Black Folk." *Call and Response: The Riverside Anthology of the African American Literary Tradition*. Eds. Patricia Liggins Hill, et al. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998. 737-742.
- Dunbar, Paul Laurence. *Lyrics of Lowly Life: The Poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar*. New York: Citadel, 1984.

- . "A Negro Love Song." *Call and Response: The Riverside Anthology of the African American Literary Tradition*. Eds. Patricia Liggins Hill, et al. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998. 608.
- Edouart, Auguste. *Auguste Edouart's Silhouettes of Eminent Americans 1839-1844*. Ed. Andrew Oliver. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1977.
- Ehrenreich, Barbara and Dedrick Muhammad. "The Recession's Racial Divide." <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/13/opinion/13ehrenreich.html>.
- English, Darby. "A New Context for Reconstruction: Some Crises of Landscape in Kara Walker's Silhouette Installations." *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness*. Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 2007: 71-136.
- Evans, Elizabeth C. "The Study of Physiognomy in the Second Century A.D." *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 72 (1941): 96-108.
- . "Physiognomics in the Roman Empire." *The Classical Journal* 45.6 (1950): 277-382.
- Fitzgerald, Sally. Introduction. *Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor*. Sel. and ed. by Sally Fitzgerald. New York: Farrar, 1979.
- Forgione, Nancy. "The Shadow Only: Shadow and Silhouette in Late Nineteenth Century Paris." *Art Bulletin* 81.3 (1999): 490-512.
- Forti, Simona. "The Biopolitics of Souls: Racism, Nazism, and Plato." *Political Theory* 34.1 (2006): 9-32.
- Gates, Henry Louis. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literature*. New York: Oxford UP, 1988.
- Gerald, Kelly. "The World of the Cartoons and Their Importance to O'Connor's Fiction." *Flannery O'Connor's Radical Reality*. Eds. Jan Nordby Gretlund and Karl-Heinz Westarp. Columbia: U South Carolina P, 2006. 26-41.
- Gordon, Donald E. *Expressionism: Art and Ideas*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1987.
- Gordon, Lewis R. *Bad Faith and Anti-Black Racism*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities, 1995.
- Guggenheim Museum. *Moving Pictures: Contemporary Photography and Video from the Guggenheim Museum Collections*. New York: Guggenheim Foundation, 2003.
- Hannaham, James. "Pea, Ball, Bounce: Interview with Kara Walker." *Interview* Nov. 1998: 99-119.
- Harris, Herbert W., Ezra Griffith, and Howard C. Blue, eds. *Racial and Ethnic Identity: Psychological Development and Creative Expression*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

- Harvey, Mattea. "Kara Walker." *Bomb: A Quarterly Arts and Culture Magazine*. Summer 2007: <<http://bombsite.com/issues/100/articles/2904>>.
- Hill, Patricia Liggins, et al, eds. *Call and Response: The Riverside Anthology of the African American Literary Tradition*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998.
- Hippocrates. *On Airs, Waters, and Places*. 4000 B.C.E.
<http://classics.mit.edu/Hippocrates/airwatpl.html>.
- Holmes, David G. "Affirmative Reaction: Kennedy, Nixon, King and the Evolution of Color Blind Rhetoric." *Rhetoric Review* 26.1 (2007): 25-41.
- Hughes, Langston. "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain." *Call and Response: The Riverside Anthology of the African American Literary Tradition*. Eds. Patricia Liggins Hill, et al. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998. 899-902.
- Janus, Elizabeth. "As American as Apple Pie." *Parkett Series with Contemporary Artists* 59 (2000): 139-140.
- Joselit, David. "Notes on Surface: Toward a Genealogy of Flatness." *Theory in Contemporary Art Since 1985*. Eds. Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung. New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005. 293-308.
- Kauffman, Eric. "The Dominant Ethnic Moment: Towards the Abolition of 'Whiteness.'" *Ethnicities* 6.2 (2006): 231-266.
- Kennedy, Randall. *Nigger: The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word*. New York: Vintage, 2001.
- Kershaw, Sarah. "Talk About Race? Relax, It's Okay." *New York Times* 15 Jan. 2009, nat'l. ed., sec. E1+.
- Knipe, Penley. "Paper Profiles: American Portrait Silhouettes." *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation (JAIC)* 41. 3 (2002): 202-223.
- Lavater, Johann Kaspar. *Essays on Physiognomy: For the Promotion of the Knowledge and Love of Mankind*. Trans. By Thomas Holcroft. London: Paternoster-Row, 1789.
- Levitine, George. "Addenda to Robert Rosenblum's *The Origin of Painting: A Problem in the Iconography of Romantic Classicism*." *Art Bulletin* 40.4. (1958): 329-331.
- Magee, Rosemary M., ed. *Conversations with Flannery O'Connor*. Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 1987.
- Mayor, A. Hyatt. Introduction. *Auguste Edouart's Silhouettes of Eminent Americans 1839-1844*. Ed. Andrew Oliver. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1977.
- . "Silhouette and Profile Portraits: The Mary Martin Collection." *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 35. 3 (1940): 50-54.

- McCauley, Anne. Untitled Review of *A Human Comedy: Physiognomy and Caricature in 19th Century Paris* by Judith Wechsler. *Art Bulletin* 66. 2 (1984): 342-344.
- Mercer, Kobena. "Intermezzo Worlds" in "Liminalities: Discussions on the Global and The Local." Eds. Monica Amor, et al. *Art Journal* 57. 4 (1988): 29-49.
- Middleton, Joyce Irene. "Symposium: Talking About Race and Whiteness in *Crash*." *College English* 69:4 (2007): 321-334.
- Miguel, Marilyn. "Faltering on Demand: Readings of Freud's Dream of Irma." Rev. of *Postal Survival, or the Question of the Navel* by Shoshana Feldman. *Diacritics* 20. 2 (1990): 20-39.
- Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1990.
- . "Unspeakable Things Made Spoken: The African-American Presence in Literature." *The Tanner Lecture on Human Values*. Ann Arbor: U Michigan P, 1988.
- Moshenson, Edna. "The Emancipation Approximation." *Kara Walker*. London: Deutsche Bank, 2002.
- Murphy, James. "The Metarhetoric of Aristotle, with Some Examples from His *On Memory and Recollection*." *Rhetoric Review* 21.3 (2002): 213-228.
- Nelson, Jim. Letter. "What We Talk About When We Talk About Birth Certificates." *GQ Magazine* Sept. 2009: 108.
- Norris, Michele. "Holder's 'Cowards' Comments Examined." *All Things Considered*. Interview, NPR Radio, Feb. 20, 2009.
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=100939348>
- Obama, Barak. Address on Race.
http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2008/03/18/us/politics/20080318_OBAMA_GRAP_HIC.html
- Obrist, Hans Ulrich. Interview with Kara Walker. *Museum in Progress*.
www.artmode.se/artobit/issue4.
- O'Connor, Flannery. *Collected Works*. New York: Library of America, 1988.
- . *Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor*. Ed. Sally Fitzgerald. New York: Farrar, 1979.
- . *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose*. Eds. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald. New York: Farrar, 1969.
- Oliver, Andrew. Preface. *Auguste Edouart's Silhouettes of Eminent Americans, 1839-1844*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1977.

- Oliver, Kelly. "Seeing Race." *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2001. 147-68.
- Olopade, Dayo. "Skip Gates Speaks." *The Root* 21 Jul. 2009.
<http://www.theroot.com/views/skip-gates-speaks>.
- Perry, Pamela. "White Means Never Having to Say You're Ethnic: White Youth and the Construction of 'Cultureless' Identities." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 30.1 (2001): 56-91.
- Phaidon Press Limited. *30,000 Years of Art: The Story of Human Creativity Across Time and Space*. New York: Phaidon, 2007.
- Pindell, Howardena. "A Conference Paper from *Trade Routes/History, Geography, Culture in the Late 20th Century*. Johannesburg Biennale, October 1997." *N. Paradoxa* 7 (1998): 1-8.
- . "Introduction." *Kara Walker—No | Kara Walker—Yes | Kara Walker—?*. New York: Midmarch, 2009.
- Plato. *The Republic*. Trans. Benjamin Jowett. New York: Modern Library, 1941.
- Pliny the Elder. *The Natural History*. Eds. John Bostock and H. T. Riley.
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?lookup=Plin.+Nat.+toc>
- Rich, Frank. "The Rage is Not About Health Care." *New York Times* online. 27 Mar 2010 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/28/opinion/28rich.html?emc=eta1>>
- Rodriguez, Jason. "Color-Blind Ideology and the Cultural Appropriation of Hip-Hop." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35. 6 (2006): 645-668.
- Saltz, Jerry. Interview. "Kara Walker: Ill-Will and Desire." *Flash Art* 11-12 (1996): 86.
- . "Kara Walker." http://www.artnet.com/magazine_pre2000/features/saltz/saltz11-24-98.asp
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. Trans. and Intro. Hazel E. Barnes. New York: Washington Square, 1966.
- Seel, Cynthia L. *Ritual Performance in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor*. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2001.
- Seshagiri, Urmila "Orienting Virginia Woolf: Race, Aesthetics, and Politics in "To the Lighthouse." *Modern Fiction Studies* 50.1 (2004): 58-84.
- Shaw, Gwendolyn DuBois. "Final Cut." *Parkett Series with Contemporary Artists* 59 (2000): 129-132.
- . *Seeing the Unspeakable: The Art of Kara Walker*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2004.

- Shome, Raka. "Race and Popular Cinema: the Rhetorical Strategies of Whiteness in *City of Joy*." *Communication Quarterly* 44:4 (1996): 502-518.
- Stone, Donald. "The Achievement of Matisse." *Sewanee Review* 115:1 (2007): 152-55.
- Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *Uncle Tom's Cabin: or Life Among the Lowly*. 1941.
<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/STOWE/Stowe.html>.
- Talbot, Margaret. "The Rorschach Chronicles." *New York Times Online*. 17 Oct. 1999.
<http://www.nytimes.com/1999/10/17/magazine/the-rorschach-chronicles.html>.
- Thomas, Pierre and Jason Ryan. "Stinging Remarks on Race from Attorney General." <http://abcnews.go.com/TheLaw/story?id=6905255&page=1>.
- Trager, Avy. "What's White Got to Do with It?: Teaching Whiteness. Part II" *Modern Language Studies* 32.1 (2002): 133-173.
- Trebay, Guy. "Has the 'Obama Effect' Come to Runway Casting?" *New York Times.com*. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/15/fashion/13diary.html?em>.
- Tuhkanen, Mikko. "Of Blackface and Paranoid Knowledge: Richard Wright, Jacques Lacan, and the Ambivalence of Black Minstrelsy." *Diacritics* 31. 2 (2003): 9-34.
- Turner, Victor. *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1975.
- Twine, Richard. "Physiognomy, Phrenology and the Temporality of the Body." *Body and Society* 8.1 (2002): 67-88.
- Unsigned and Untitled Review of *Auguste Edouart's Silhouettes of Eminent Americans, 1839-1844* by Andrew Oliver. *American Art Journal* 9. 2 (1977): 109.
- Walker, Alice. "Beyond the Peacock: The Reconstruction of Flannery O'Connor." In *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. Orlando: Harcourt, 1983. 42-59.
- . "Lulls." In *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. Orlando: Harcourt, 1983: 181-198.
- . "A South without Myths." *Sojourners* 23.10 (1994-95).
<http://www.mondowendell.com/walkersw.html>.
- Walker, Hamza. "A Mind is a Terrible Thing to Waste." *Witness to Her Art*. New York: Center for Curatorial Studies, 2006. 262-70.
- . "Nigger Lover or Will There Be Any Black People in Utopia?" *Parkett* 59: (2000): 152-58.
- Walker, Kara. "Front Matter." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 23.1 (1997).

- . "Motifs & Motivations: The Historical Romance and & Me." *Witness to Her Art*. New York: Center for Curatorial Studies, 2006.
- Washington, Jesse. "Analysis: Gates arrest a signpost on racial road." *The Washington Post* 22 July 2009. < <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/07/21/AR2009072102694.html>
- Wheatley, Phillis. "On the Death of General Wooster." *Call and Response: The Riverside Anthology of the African American Literary Tradition*. Eds. Patricia Liggins Hill, et al. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998. 103.
- White, Hayden. *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990.
- Whitehill, Virginia N. "Consider the Portrait." *Parnassus* 12. 4 (1940): 49.
- Willink, Kate. "Domesticating Difference: Performing Memories of School Desegregation." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 27.1 (2007): 20-40.
- Winders, Jamie. "White in All the Wrong Places: White Rural Poverty in the Postbellum US South." *Cultural Geographies* 10.1 (2003): 45-63.
- Wood, Ralph C. "Flannery O'Connor's Racial Morals and Manners-Cover Story." *FindArticles.com*. 24 June 2009.
http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1058/is_n33_v111/ai_15969380/?tag=content;col1.
- Zabunyan, Elvan. *Black is a Color (A History of African American Art)*. Trans. Paul Buck and Catherine Petit. Paris: Editions Dis Voir, 2005.
- Zeleny, Jeff. "In Reid's Comments, Hints of Obama's Own Words." <http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/01/11/in-reids-comments-hints-of-obamas-own-words/?scp=1&sq=In%20Reid's%20Comments&st=cse>.
- Zeleny, Jeff and Jim Rutenberg. "As Race Debate Grows, Obama Steers Clear of It." <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/17/us/politics/17obama.html?scp=1&sq=as%20race%20debate%20grows,%20obama&st=cse>.